

Xinjiang: A centre-periphery conflict in display.

*An analysis of the Chinese state- and nation-building machinery in
Xinjiang and the mobilization of Uyghur counter-cultures.*

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Master thesis

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September 2007

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my perceptive and always encouraging supervisor Harald Bøckman at the Centre for Development and the Environment. I would also like to forward my appreciation to Knut Heidar at the Department of Political Science (University of Oslo) who provided me with invaluable advice at the very start of my “scientific voyage”.

I wish to thank the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (their China programme) and the Department of Political Science (UIO) for their generous financial support. Moreover, thanks to all the helpful people I met during my stay in Central Asia. Thanks to Semet Abla who put me in contact with important Uyghur diasporic leaders. Thanks to Ivar Dale and Davran, who certainly made my day in Bishkek. The tips from the well travelled Jon-Geir Dittmann was also of paramount importance.

In addition, thanks to all my teachers (especially Anne Berggrav), scholars and co-students who have been of great support through the tide of time. To mention a few, thanks to Karl Magnus, Tore and Tommy (Kosovo and Kabul), ISCO-Magnus, Tuften, Lars, Christian G, Lars Sverre, Anette, Cecilie, Heidi, Erle, and the others charming people at Blindern. Thanks to the talented Ingeborg Dittmann who gave me such a “flying start” at my university studies.

Most importantly, I wish to give my appreciations to my family, for their patience, understanding, and recent interest for the Uyghurs.

This thesis contains about 41,000 words all included. There are bound to be shortcomings in the study, and for these I take full responsibility.

Truls Winje
September 2007.

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List of acronyms

Bingtuan	Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps
CIA	Chinese Islamic Association
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
ETIC	Eastern Turkistan Information Center
ETIM	East Turkistan Islamic Movement
ETLO	East Turkistan Liberation Organization
ETNC	East Turkistan National Congress
ETNFC	East Turkistan National Freedom Center
ETR	East Turkistan Republic
ETUE	Eastern Turkistan Union in Europe
GMD	Guomindang (Chinese nationalist party)
INA	Ili National Party
IUHRDF	Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
TIRET	Turkic-Islamic Republic of East-Turkistan
UAA	Uyghur American Association
UCA	Uyghur Canadian Association
UHRP	Uyghur Human Rights Project
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation
WUC	World Uyghur Congress
WUYC	The World Uyghur Youth Congress
XUAR	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region



1.0. Xinjiang: An introduction.

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is situated in the northwestern corner of the People's Republic of China (PRC), and borders Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Russia and Mongolia. As China's largest province it amounts to a sixth of its land area, contains huge deposits of oil and gas, and furthermore, houses the China's nuclear test facilities. A glance at a map of the region reveals Xinjiang's remoteness, with its southern borders actually closer to Baghdad or New Delhi, than to Beijing, the political centre of present day China.

Historically, Xinjiang constituted a pivot in the trade routes of the fabled Silk Road, and thus functioned as a "cultural blotter" for different civilizations from the Middle East, Europe, the Indian subcontinent and China proper (Starr 2004:7). Moreover, the dramatic topography has had a fragmenting effect on Xinjiang and exposed it to centrifugal forces, pulling the region in different directions. Hence one may observe an utterly complex cultural zone, with a great variety in the way people settle, cultivate the land, practice their religion, and finally, how they perceive the ruling Chinese Communist party (CCP) (Perdue 2005:32, Millward 2007: XII).

Regarding Xinjiang's function as a "cultural blotter", it has throughout the course of history attracted a variety of polities, historical formations and warlords, aspiring to be the region's dominant *loci* of command. Hence, it has not been a matter of course that the issuant communist regime (incepted in 1949), should succeed in their attempt to "lock-in" (control) the region and its indigenous people. Quite the contrary, the authorities have encountered ardent opposition from the numerically dominant Muslim Uyghurs of Turkic kinship. Even though other minority groups also occupy a role in present day Xinjiang, this thesis mainly concerns the centre-periphery relation between the governing Han-Chinese authorities and the Uyghurs.

My expressed aspiration is to illuminate how the PRC government launches successive territorial, jurisdictional, economical and cultural thrusts toward Uyghurs, in their process of state and nation-building in Xinjiang. Sharply different from their dominant Han-Chinese counterpart, Uyghur counter-cultures have mobilized to protect their distinctiveness (resist PRC nation-building). Some Uyghur movements have even challenged China's state building project, by advocating the initiation of an East

Turkistan state at the territory of Xinjiang. Thus, Beijing has effectuated a variety of strategies to effectively “lock-in”/neutralize Uyghur separatist sentiments and ensure their allegiance to the Chinese nation.¹ However, the two sides seem diametrically opposed, and the following question emerges; why is the territory of Xinjiang so pivotal for the communist leadership and what is actually at stake?

In brief, the geopolitical location of Xinjiang (adjoining eight countries) is a key aspect in this regard, where the authorities want to be influential in the “new Great Game” of Central Asia. Another important factor is the presence of radical Islam in Central Asia, Pakistan and Afghanistan, literally on the doormat of China. Hence, the PRC authorities have been firmly present in Xinjiang, ready to deter regime-threatening movements. From a geo-economical perspective, Xinjiang has also been of significance, serving as a transit area for energy transportation from the neighbouring Kazakhstan to China proper. Furthermore, Xinjiang itself possesses rich deposits of oil, natural gas, coal and nonferrous metals, which is alluring for the Chinese authorities.

Section 1.1 now proceeds with a review of Xinjiang’s historical junctures, in order to comprehend contemporary developments in the region. These historical considerations are simply put, *a sine qua non* for the understanding of both Uyghur grievance and the PRC’s prevailing *modus operandi* in Xinjiang. This in turn paves the way for an elaboration of my research questions in section 1.2.

1.1 The Xinjiang-conflict in a historical perspective.

To the dismissal of Michael Dillon, James Millward and other Sinologists, official Chinese publications assert that Xinjiang has always been an integral part of China:

Since the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C-24 A.D.), Xinjiang has been an inseparable part of the unitary multi-ethnic Chinese nation [...]. The Chinese central governments of all historical periods exercised military and administrative jurisdiction over Xinjiang. The jurisdiction of the central governments over the Xinjiang region was at times strong and at other times weak, depending on the stability of the period.²

The mentioned Sinologists argue that Xinjiang by and large remained independent from China proper until the inception of the PRC in 1949. Prior to this, the region was imprinted in warlord rivalry and exposed to competition from a variety of political formations (Dillon 2004:17-18, Millward 2004:2-4). However, it is undisputed that the

¹ The Chinese nation is officially constituted of 56 ethnic groups, and numerically dominated by the Han-Chinese (92 percent).

² PRC Embassy (2003). “History and development of Xinjiang” (part 1). White Paper.

Qing imperial dynasty's (1644-1911) annexation of Xinjiang in 1760, brought a more permanent presence from the hinterland. The Manchus from Manchuria (northeastern regions of present day China) invaded China in 1644, which heralded the era of the Qing dynasty. The Qing utilized an expansionist approach and gradually annexed Mongolia, Xinjiang and Tibet into their empire (Dillon 2004:17).

In their endeavours to make Xinjiang an integral part of the Qing dynasty and fortify the link between Xinjiang and China interior, garrisons and military state farms were established with Ili as the administrative centre.³ The Qing utilized existing political and economical structures to govern the region, but contact with the local peoples was nonetheless minimized. Thus, this became an epoch of minimal interference in the indigenous peoples' religious and cultural way of life (Perdue 2005:338, Millward 2007:107). Due to this shrewd approach, major alienation and uprisings were avoided until the 1820s, when Qing's custom regulations generated grievance and uprisings. This challenged their presence in Kashgar and other nearby cities. Jahangir from the neighbouring polity (khanate) of Kokand (present day in Uzbekistan), invaded Kashgar and massacred fleeing Qing troops. In 1827, Jahangir was ousted by Qing armies and in the following years, the first Hans from China proper settled into southern Xinjiang (Dillon 2004:17-19). This heralded a shift from an accommodative approach towards the indigenous people, to a policy where the "superior" Chinese mindset was promoted (Millward 2007:107).

In 1862, a large-scale rebellion broke out among Chinese Muslims (Hui)⁴ in the northwestern provinces Gansu and Shaanxi. This uprising spread to Xinjiang where Uyghurs and other groups accompanied the rebellious Huis. The indigenous peoples' grievance over heavy taxation and forced labour yielded a vigorous riot and with that, the Qing lost their control over Xinjiang. Yakub Beg (warlord from Kokand) filled this power vacuum and established an emirate with Kashgar as its centre. The era of Beg became imprinted in order, tightening of security and central planning, where the rule of Sharia was enforced. At this time an imperial rivalry ("The Great Game") between Russia and Great Britain, loomed large in Central Asia. Thus, Beg's emirate seemed to

³ Ili is the Russian name and is known as Yining in Chinese and Ghulja to the Kazakhs and Uyghurs. These state farms are considered to be historical forerunners for the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (Bingtuan). Ever since its inception in 1954, the paramilitary Bingtuan has been a paramount "state building tool" for the PRC government, in their endeavours to counter separatist movements.

⁴ Hui is also known as (T)Dungans and in the 2000-census, they constituted 4,6 percent of Xinjiang's total population (18,5 millions).

provide Great Britain with a desired buffer between their vassal state India, and an expanding Russia, with territorial ambitions in Central Asia. Nevertheless, Russian forces eventually entered into Ili (northern Xinjiang) in 1871. Beg then found it opportune to conclude a commercial agreement with Russia, while simultaneously aspiring to maintain good relations with the British. Consequently, Xinjiang was anything but the Qing's *chasse garde*, and Beg's emirate (from Urumqi and southwards) was not under any substantial threat until late 1870s, when he encountered his nemesis, the Qing commander Zuo Zongtang (2007:122-25).

General Zuo embodied military ingenuity by setting up secure supply lines inside the China mainland and establish depots in Shaanxi and Gansu. Furthermore, he employed native troops more adaptable to the regions' demanding conditions. With a remarkable effort, Zuo's endeavours eventually materialized and as the emirate imploded, Beg allegedly committed suicide. Hence, Russian forces withdrew, and in 1884, Xinjiang was assigned provincial status and formally incorporated into the empire. The Chinese name Xinjiang (new frontier/territory), first gained currency as a political label with this provincehood (Tyler 2003:70-87, Dillon 2004:17-19).

The post-1884 era witnessed a remarkable change in the mindset of rulers and intellectuals. Thenceforward, they came to view the region as an inseparable part of the dynasty. Political diversity became an anathema and the new Xinjiang-policies favoured a Chinese-style administration, exclusively governed by Han Chinese. The officials endorsed intensified influx of Hans and provided an assimilative Confucian education for segments of the Turkic population. With the Republican revolution in 1911, the Qing Empire came to an end and its successor the Republic of China, was officially inaugurated on January 1, 1912 (Millward and Tursun 2004:63).

At this stage, the autocratic Han, Yang Zengxin, positioned himself as governor of Xinjiang, with seemingly proxy in blanks. Yang managed to isolate Xinjiang from China proper and enforced strict control until he was assassinated in 1928.⁵ However, his successor, Jin Shuren was unable to effectively exert control and his departure from the tradition of co-opting indigenous leaders, alienated Xinjiang's ethnic groups and their leadership (2004:71, Dillon 2004:20). Jin's misrule eventually sparked off

⁵ Yang maintained a centralized control by balancing various ethnic groups, and allowing their leaders to enrich themselves. This was an incentive for the indigenous elites to uphold their allegiance to Yang (Millward 2007:182-83).

large-scale rebellions, and in 1931, the Gansu-based Hui warlord Ma Zhongying entered Xinjiang, seemingly to support local Muslims in their uprisings. Governor Jin appointed the Manchurian Sheng Shicai to military counter Ma and other regime-threatening forces, but he nevertheless fell in a coup in 1933. Jin was then succeeded by Sheng, whose anti-Japanese stance (Japan had at this stage annexed Manchuria and Inner Mongolia and glanced at Xinjiang) ensured a strong support from the Soviet Union. As rumours indicated that Japanese aides had sided with Ma, the Soviet leadership stepped up its assistance to Sheng (Millward and Tursun 2004: 71-77).

By the end of 1933, Sheng's position was "extremely shaky" due to the threat of Ma's armed forces to the north, and the inception of a rival polity in Kashgar, the Sharia-governed Turkic-Islamic Republic of East-Turkistan (TIRET). TIRET's leaders created a framework for an independent state (cabinet, national assembly, constitution, and own flag⁶), and was also perceived as a threat by Soviet leaders. Their main fear was that pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic sentiments could spill over to Soviet Central Asia. TIRET's dialogue with delegates from Nazi Germany and Japan gave rise to even more concern, and *in toto*, the presence of TIRET and the anti-Soviet warlord Ma, made Soviet support Sheng with military forces and technology (Dickens 1990).

The interference from Soviet forced Ma's units to move southwards to Kashgar, where they in February 1934 brutally dislodged the TIRET-regime. This in turn attracted a military offensive from Sheng, and subsequently Ma mysteriously fled into Soviet (unknown faith) (Millward 2007:200).⁷ At this stage, Sheng consolidated his power basis and operated *de facto* independently, although his position was *de jure* subordinated to the Chinese National Government in Nanjing (Guomindang, GMD). Sheng immediately prohibited the presence of secessionist movements, and in order to generate some regime-loyalty among the indigenous people, a few of their leaders obtained senior posts in his administration. Moreover, with inputs from his Soviet advisors, Sheng effectuated a "Stalinist-type ethnic taxonomy", where the Turkic Muslim oasis dwellers were referred to as Uyghurs, while other groups were defined as Kazakhs, Tungans (Hui), Hans and so forth (Millward 2007:207).

⁶ This is considered to be a paramount juncture for Uyghur nationalism and initially the founders of this polity referred to it as the Republic of Uyghuristan. However, it was soon changed to TIRET as other Turkic people also resided in Xinjiang, and occupied a position in the government (Millward 2007:201-03).

⁷ Regarding Ma's faith, it is assumed that he either died in connection with the W.W. 2 or was liquidated by Stalin (Millward 2007:200).

Xinjiang in the late 1930s and early 1940s was a region imprinted in chaos, where Turkic Muslims continuously launched rebellious efforts against Sheng. At this stage, Sheng embodied the “tidesman” by frequently shifting his outside patrons, and in 1944 this strategic positioning led to his downfall.⁸ In late 1944, Kazakh and Uyghur movements ousted Sheng and GMD troops from Ili/Ghulja in the north. The Soviet Union endorsed this rebellion and in November 1944, the East Turkistan Republic (ETR 1944-49) was proclaimed in northern Xinjiang. While the Chinese authorities and scholars today label the struggle against Sheng as “the Three-Region Revolution”, and moreover, depict it as a part of the “Chinese Democratic Revolution”, the ETR’s inception itself, is viewed as a conspiracy by a “few feudalist top figures” (Li 2005:151). According to the Chinese scholar Li Sheng, religious figures and feudalists in the region insisted on “taking the splittist road”, and thus, contradicted the “fundamental interest of people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang” (2005:157, 162).⁹

Initially, the ETR had an Islamic orientation, but already in 1945, it appeared more secular and pro-Soviet. Eventually, the Soviet Union pressed the ETR leadership to reach a cease-fire with the remaining Guomindang military forces in Xinjiang.¹⁰ Hence, they governed Xinjiang jointly, but a profound mutual mistrust prevailed from the very start, and the coalition fell apart in 1947. The ETR government continued to govern in the north, but like the GMD regime in Urumqi, it came to an end in 1949, when the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) entered the region. This heralded an era of unitary communist rule throughout Xinjiang (Dillon 2004:32, Millward 2007:210-31).

The “peaceful liberation of Xinjiang”: An era of unitary communist rule:

The Chinese regime officially depicts this event with the following words;

Xinjiang was peacefully liberated on September 25, 1949 [...]. The people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang greeted the founding of the People’s Republic of China together with the rest of the Chinese people on October 1, 1949.¹¹

⁸ For several years, Soviet was Sheng’s patron, whose position in Xinjiang depended upon outside assistance. In the spring of 1942, he shifted to the nationalist GMD (supported by the U.S.). When Soviet prevailed over Germany in the 1943-battle of Stalingrad, Sheng unsuccessfully tried to bandwagon with Stalin, but was eventually removed from power by the GMD in 1944 (Millward 2007:211).

⁹ Comparing TIRET (1933) with ETR (1944-49), Li asserts that the latter regime was more “devastating in arousing separation and harming the political and social landscape in Xinjiang” (2005:150). Moreover, it allegedly “was a historical retrogression disrupting China’s unity, and seriously violated the fundamental interest of the Chinese people and people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang” (2005:148).

¹⁰ Xinjiang Turkic nationalists did not unitarily endorse the ETR. Some even supported the GMD (among other the departed Isa Yusuf Alptekin (1901-1995) as they had different perceptions on how to achieve genuine autonomy for the region. Millward actually asserts that the indigenous people in reality were caught “between the Soviet Scylla and the Chinese Charibdis” (2007:230).

¹¹ PRC Embassy (2003). “History and development of Xinjiang” (part 3). White Paper.

Only with this territorial penetration were local warlords and Xinjiang's indigenous people subjected to one dominant *loci* of command. Thenceforward, the Chinese authorities embarked on a continuous process of territorial consolidation in Xinjiang. A priority was given to confine the establishment of alternative political formations in the region, which evidently conflicted with Uyghur nationalists' aspiration for a continuation of the ETR. The latter's momentum became further impaired in 1949, when prominent Uyghur leaders were killed in a mysterious plane crash on their way to Beijing for negotiations on Xinjiang (Dillon 2004:34).

During the period of 1949-1955, the government sought to generate support from the masses by initiating land reforms. The landowners' land were expropriated and redistributed to the poor peasants. This initial phase refrained from alienating the poorer local segments, whereas the well-educated local elites were undermined (Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004:307). Furthermore, institutionalized Islam in Xinjiang became regulated under the supervision of the authorities. The mosques lost a valuable source of revenue with the confiscation of their arable land, and the prohibition of Islamic taxes further deteriorated their position (Millward and Tursun 2004:88).

In 1954 and 1955, the region underwent two landmark organisational restructurings, which had ripple effects extending to present day Xinjiang. The first juncture refers to the establishment of the paramilitary Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (henceforward Bingtuan). The second juncture refers to the 1955-event, where Xinjiang became the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). A comprehensive assessment on these events and their importance for Xinjiang constitutes the backbone of chapter 4.1. However, at this stage, a brief historical outline seems suitable in order to grasp the historical context.

In 1954, demobilized PLA-troops and conquered Muslim and Guomindang forces, were transformed into the centralized and paramilitary Bingtuan. The initiation of Bingtuan served the twofold purpose of cultivating land for agricultural enterprises and to defend Xinjiang's borders. Later, and until today, the Bingtuan has functioned as an instrument to clamp down on domestic riots as well. Since its founding days, the Bingtuan has also absorbed the influx of several million Hans and dramatically altered

the region's ethnic composition. These Hans have been provided with education, jobs and social benefits (Taylor 2003:135, Wiemer 2004:169).

With the XUAR's autonomous status in 1955, it seemed like the numerically dominant Uyghurs attained a *de jure* proxy to govern themselves, but in reality they were not allowed any genuine autonomy. Compared to ordinary provinces, Xinjiang actually enjoyed less legislative autonomy and the authorities embarked on stricter policies toward the minorities. China-wide campaigns like the "Hundred Flowers movement" (1957, incarceration of several minority leaders), the "Great Leap Forward" (1958-60, merger of enormous agricultural cooperatives), and the infamous "Cultural Revolution" (1966-76), embodied this approach. This era became imprinted in chaos, starvation, massive influx of Hans, attacks on indigenous peoples' way of life, and a mass-exodus of Kazaks and Uyghurs into the Soviet Union.¹² The latter event contributed to further acidify the Sino-Soviet relation, and on several occasions, the former allies came at brink of war (Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004:300, 306-7).

With Chairman Mao Zedong's death in 1976, reforming forces inside the Communist party gained ground. Two years later in 1978, Deng Xiaoping came forth as PRC's new leader and initiated reforms of economic liberalization. Moreover, the regime allowed the indigenous people to cultivate and preserve their distinctiveness, without the restrictions that hallmarked the previous decades. Hence, several mosques reopened and Islamic literature circulated overtly. In the spirit of the times, China further normalized its relationship with neighbouring countries, and renewed cultural and economic interaction with the rest of Central Asia (as old as the fabled Silk Road), which replaced forty years of isolation (Gladney 2004a:110, Boddington 2004:132).

At the same time many Uyghurs voiced grievance over the presence and continuous influx of Hans, and demanded independence for Xinjiang (Dillon 2004:59). The Baren uprisings (nearby Kashgar) in 1990 constitute a critical juncture in this respect, where Xinjiang now glided into overt conflict and violence. In addition to the influx by Hans, other factors like nuclear weapons testing, birth control policies and the exploitation of Xinjiang's natural resources generated Uyghur grievance. Some Uyghurs even employed an Islamic terminology and allegedly advocated Jihad against

¹² Thousands of Kazakhs and Uyghurs migrated to Soviet in 1962, as they perceived the political climate there to be more tolerable (Dillon 2004:30).

the Hans. The PLA was brought in to gain control of the riots, and in the end this entailed several Uyghur casualties (Dillon 2004:62, Millward 2004:14).

The Baren uprisings heralded the outset of a decade with dramatic large-scale uprisings. This tense situation was reflected in the Document number 7, a classified paper by the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Politburo in 1996. Xinjiang was at that stage identified as the most serious threat China's territorial integrity and social stability. Implicit, the situation in Taiwan and Tibet, caused less concern than the critical developments in Xinjiang (Dillon 2004:136).

The state of high alert may also be traced back to the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the wake of this critical juncture, independent Turkic states were established in Central Asia and *de jure* internationally recognized. The new course of independency inspired many Uyghurs and triggered a reminiscence of the two previous East Turkistani republics (1933 and 1944-49). Uyghur voices for a change of *status quo* have been noticeable, but marked by diversity the last fifteen years. Three main trajectories for a preferable end state arguably stand out (Starr 2004:345-349):

1. General improvement of Uyghurs' socio-economic status under Chinese rule.
2. *De facto* provincial autonomy, as the region already holds *de jure* autonomy.
3. Territorial secession from China, either materialised in an Islamic state based on the rule of Sharia, or a national state based on the rule of secular law.

The trajectories of number two and three are unconceivable options for the authorities, as they aspire to have an everlasting hold on the region. A well adapted Xinjiang is so pivotal due to the region's geopolitical and geo-economical location. Hence, the notion of East Turkistan constitutes an anathema, only referring to the past before the "taming of the wild" Xinjiang. Official documents on the whole emphasize that Uyghurs' future prospects lie within the PRC. Several Uyghurs have reconciled with this reality and aspire to improve their social status within the Chinese framework.

Conversely, some Uyghur movements (secular as well as Islamic) have advocated the initiation of a new East Turkistan Republic. The PRC authorities employ a wide range of strategies to counter these movements, and their determination have increased further in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. These measures have arguably restricted ordinary Uyghurs in their daily life, although the Chinese

authorities stress that their policies only target Uyghur East Turkistani groups with an “evident” link to international terrorism. Thus, they justify their course of action as an inseparable part on the international “War on terrorism”. As a result, the international media has also become more attentive of developments in Xinjiang, as they arguably “identify” a potential “clash of civilisations” à la Samuel Huntington.

Recently, the Chinese authorities have encountered a significant challenge with the dissenting Uyghur voice of Rebyia Kadeer. The previously incarcerated human rights activist and “Mother of all Uyghurs”, Kadeer (released from Chinese imprisonment in 2005), vigorously entered the international scene to “illuminate the inner life” of Xinjiang, and to rally support for their cause. This culminated on June 5, 2007, when Kadeer obtained a private audience with the U.S. President George W. Bush, and was able to address the situation in Xinjiang. This is of great concern for the Chinese regime, who vigorously ambitions to defame Kadeer as “a convicted criminal” in the international discourse.¹³ Tensions between the Uyghur diaspora and the PRC are likely to intensify further as the Beijing Olympics approaches in 2008.

1.2. Research questions and their utilitarian value for the studies of Xinjiang.

An advancing international research-milieu has over the last decades provided innovative studies and a variety of approaches to explore the internal dynamics of Xinjiang. Hence, invaluable in-depth studies have been conducted on such various topics as the PLA, Bingtuan, Islam, Uyghur identity, educational systems, linguistic standards, Uyghur folklore, economical projects, topography, Uyghur expatriates’ activities and so forth. The annual academic output has been noticeable and the tragic incidents on September 11, 2001, with its ripple effects on Xinjiang, further increased the public and scholarly interest for the region.¹⁴

In the wake of September 11, 2001, the increased interest has occasioned several extensive volumes from notable experts on Xinjiang. Thus in 2004, the comprehensive volume, the “Xinjiang China’s Muslim Borderland” edited by Fredrick

¹³ PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007): “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Jiang Yu’s Regular Press Conference on 7 June, 2007”. Yu stated the following: “Every one knows well what kind of person Rebiya Kadeer is. She is a convicted criminal. The relevant remarks and activities of the US are blatant interference in China’s internal affairs. We express strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition to it”.

¹⁴ In general this event had ripple effects on various territorial centre-periphery conflicts around the world. In its aftermath, a window of opportunity unveiled for several regimes to bandwagon with the U.S. in the “War on terrorism”. The implication of this rapprochement was unambiguous. Regimes like Russia (Chechnya) and China (Xinjiang, Tibet), seemingly obtained a *carte blanche* to clamp down on separatist movements, and in the Chinese discourse, Uyghur nationalists and separatists were suddenly equated with international terrorism.

Starr, enabled an ordinary reader to grasp the complexity of present day Xinjiang. This volume comprised all major aspects regarding Xinjiang, and these authors have also published several articles on their own. In addition, the scholarly books by Michael Dillon (“Xinjiang- China’s Muslim Far Northwest”, 2004), and James A. Millward (“Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang”, 2007), complement the “Xinjiang China’s Muslim Borderland” in the academic sphere. Moreover, Chinese scholars published the book “Xinjiang of China: Its Past and Present” in 2005, which enabled the reader to comprehend how the Chinese authorities perceive the situation.

However, Xinjiang has not received sufficient attention from political scientists, working systematically within a state- and nation-building paradigm. Previously published papers and volumes have overwhelmingly been written in the pen of anthropologists, historians, sinologists and researchers of religious practise. A thesis embedded in theoretical conceptualisation of state- and nation-building, may thus fill a void in the literature.¹⁵ Considering this, my focus is directed at the centre-periphery dynamics of Xinjiang, where the PRC authorities have aspired to foreclose the region’s external boundaries, consolidate the territory and administer it (state building). This has been followed by their centre-initiated efforts to weaken the Uyghur identity, and thereby strengthen a notion of China as the “Motherland” (nation-building).

These successive PRC state- and nation-building thrusts toward the peripheral Xinjiang have been initiated to establish Beijing as the undisputed territorial, jurisdictional, economical and cultural epicentre. Peripheral Uyghur counter-cultures (nation-builders), on the other hand, mobilize to preserve their distinctive markers (religion, language, historical interpretations and folklore). Hence, an aspiration is to maintain a strict demarcation between “us” (Uyghurs) and “them” (Han Chinese), and thereby “fortify” their primordial boundaries (identities and traits). The nucleus of a centre-periphery conflict of this calibre is the centre’s initiatives to “lock-in” the peripheral territory, its people and resources, in order to control the course of events. Contrary, the indigenous peoples of the periphery typically aspire to undermine these efforts. Consequently, the subsequent research questions transpire for my thesis:

¹⁵ Nicolas Becquelin has written two articles (about 30 pages each) which have incorporated the most central aspects of state- and nation-building. I find his contributions to be very perceptive, and my aspiration for this thesis, is to analyse these processes further.

1. Which state building strategies have the PRC authorities employed in order to secure Xinjiang from territorial secession and incorporate it to China “proper”? In this regard, what functions can be attributed to the PLA, the Bingtuan, demography policies, and finally, China’s involvement in international security arrangements?

2. In the PRC’s nation-building endeavours to cultivate a broader Chinese identity and weaken the “primordial” Uyghur identity, which strategies have unfolded? Moreover, how have these centre-initiated policies affected Uyghurs in their practice of Islam, their language and other expressions of their cultural heritage?

3. What kind of strategies do Uyghur counter-cultures inside Xinjiang, as well as expatriate Uyghurs, employ in order to counter the PRC’s nation-building efforts and thereby conserve their distinctive markers? Furthermore, do any Uyghur separatist groups pose a credible threat to China’s territorial integrity in Xinjiang?

My approach to the field of Xinjiang-studies is comprehensive (all-embracing) in its form, rather than an embedded study of a particular phenomenon. By such a study, my ambition is to illuminate the major aspects of this centre-periphery relation. Potentially, this approach may provide the more experienced scientists with a linkage between their often particularistic approach, and an overall state- and nation-building framework. Another aspiration is to introduce state- and nation-building conceptualizations and keywords, which may have utilitarian value for the wider study of Xinjiang, as well as potentially facilitate prospective comparative centre-periphery studies, inside as well as outside contemporary China.

In Chapter 3, I give a comprehensive presentation of the central terminologies and conceptualizations that occupy the centre-stage of this dissertation. However, a short introduction may be suitable at this stage. The nucleus of state- and nation-building is the process of “locking-in” a certain territory and group, by establishing various boundaries that do not render possible their “withdrawal”. These boundaries of territorial, economical, jurisdictional and cultural character refer to a distinction of privileges, titles and duties between the ones within a demarcated system, and the ones

situated outside it. The boundaries do not necessarily overlap within a system, but typically have done so in the age of European national-states.¹⁶

As a centre embarks on the process to subject a periphery under its domain, the former utilizes “boundary-transcending/penetrating technologies” to undermine a periphery’s primordial boundaries, and establish a wider set of common boundaries. This is then succeeded by a centre’s consolidating efforts (boundary-building and boundary-maintaining). An exposed periphery may on the other hand invoke various counter-forces to solidify their primordial boundaries and to undermine the centre’s endeavours. In a centre-periphery conflict where the centre exerts control in the territorial, jurisdictional and economical domain, the resistance of a counter-culture may still be persistent in the cultural sphere (preserving their distinctiveness). In addition, these forces may potentially aspire to challenge the territorial *loci* of command and work towards a territorial boundary-transcendence (separatism). How one should characterize the Xinjiang-conflict will be clarified as the thesis unfolds.

1.3. Xinjiang a *terra incognita* for social scientists?

In the 1970’s and 1980’s, Xinjiang’s remoteness began to attract a new generation of scholars and in the following decades, several scientists conducted fieldwork in the region. Some even learned to master Uyghur and Mandarin, which truly was a great asset for their fieldwork. Several incidents of violent Uyghur grievance in the 1990s and the events on September 11, 2001, made international scholars further attentive toward Xinjiang’s the centre-periphery dynamics. Simultaneously, the PRC applied a more authoritarian management style in the region, and thus, preferred to obscure the internal dynamics of Xinjiang, only showcasing histories of alleged socio-economic improvements and ethnic harmony. Consequently, the region has in reality been sealed off for international scholars aspiring to conduct fieldworks on ethnic tension, PRC’s repressive policies in Xinjiang, Uyghur separatist sentiments and so forth.¹⁷

¹⁶ At least prior to the extensive EU-integration, an implication of travelling to another territorial polity was the simultaneous “entry” into a new juridical, economical and cultural system (boundary transcendence). Arguably the EU-integration de-accentuates these boundaries.

¹⁷ In 2001, the Hong Kong-based Herbert S. Yee conducted a survey on Uyghur-Han relations in Xinjiang. Prior to the survey, Yee visited government officials and agencies in Beijing to secure permissions and cooperation from Chinese cadres at various levels. Yee persuaded governmental officials about the relevance of the study, referring to the general theme of ethnic solidarity, deliberately avoiding a wording with reference to ethnic conflicts. Nevertheless, he encountered opposition from local authorities, ranging from confiscation of completed questionnaires, pressure from local cadres, forced modification of questions now resembling propaganda slogans, and finally, at some places he was even denied to conduct his survey (2005:36, 43, 50). This example illustrates the difficulties attended with fieldwork in the region.

Another important consideration is that as the Chinese authorities have intensified their surveillance and restrictions of Uyghurs in their daily life, where the latter part has become even more reluctant/ scared to reveal their sentiments to foreigners. Colin Mackerras experienced this first hand when he visited Xinjiang in October and November 2003. In the end, he was unable to obtain any useful insight on Uyghurs' feelings toward separatist movements (2005:12). Thus, Fredrick Starr timely asserts that "strict controls arising from acute political sensitivities make it all but impossible for social scientist to conduct the kinds of field research, interviews, and surveys in Xinjiang that would be the norm for rigorous study elsewhere" (2004:16). This is naturally a dilemma for NGO's and scientists in search for reliable information, but nevertheless the reality for this particular field of study.

Reading through these reports, I chose not to survey Uyghur grievance by attempting to conduct an overt fieldwork in Xinjiang. I rather confined myself to travel around in Xinjiang for two weeks as a *prime facie* tourist, which enabled me to obtain some first hand impressions on the region. The purpose of the journey was primarily to observe how the government expands in the region, with a massive inflow of regime-loyal Han Chinese into the Uyghur's areas.¹⁸ I did met with some Uyghurs fluent in English for discrete conversations, and the information provided was considered to be a bonus for my part. In order to attain new and interesting information for the project, I therefore chose to conduct my main fieldwork outside Xinjiang. In brief, my angle of incidence was to organize in-depth interviews with exiled Uyghur leaders in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) and Almaty (Kazakhstan), who enjoy greater latitude for expression.

1.4. Structuring the thesis: Chapter 2-6.

In chapter 2, I give an account of the applied research design and methodological challenges associated with my approach. For analytical purposes and the transparency of the dissertation, I decompose my overall scientific approach into research questions,

¹⁸ Another consideration for my fieldwork was obviously the scope- and time-limitation of my thesis. Fieldwork in Xinjiang can be very time-consuming, but considered by the Chinese scholar Wang Jianxin to be an essential criteria in order to generate in-depth information. In his extensive fieldwork (totalling 22 months between 1991 and 1998), Wang made an interesting observation: There are two groups of authorities (communist cadres and clerics) who simultaneously maintain order in the village. The cadres occupy the administrative management (outer community affairs), while clerics provide religious training and maintain the social order (inner community affairs). Wang argues that non-Muslim outsiders initially encounter secular official representatives (outer community affairs) and fail to observe the genuine inner community affairs. To be accepted into the inner Uyghur community affairs is at best a lengthy process, and most likely rendered impossible, due to the authorities policies of contraction the last few years (2004: 9-10).

analytical categories (theory), the data collection, and finally how one may proceed with the analysis. These principles are in fact “hidden analytical girders” for the thesis.

Moving on to chapter 3, I present Stein Rokkan’s theoretical paradigm of state- and nation-building, along with Stefano Bartolini’s perceptive elaborations. The nucleus of this chapter is to illuminate the dialectics of **order**; a centre’s attempt to “lock-in” territories/actors by boundary-building, and **movement**; a periphery’s boundary- transcendence endeavours, which characterize the centre-periphery relation.

The PRC government’s state- and nation-building campaigns in Xinjiang constitute the “backbone” of chapter 4. The first section deals with the Chinese authorities’ efforts in the process of external boundary-demarcation and internal structuring (state building). In particular, I survey the most paramount “state building tools” available for the authorities; the PLA, the Bingtuan and the massive influx of regime loyal Hans to the region. The second section comprises PRC nation-building policies, which aim at weakening Uyghurs’ distinctive markers and bring them closer to the Chinese “mindset”. The central question to address is how this affects Uyghurs in their practice of Islam, their language and their cultural heritage.

In chapter 5, I give an account of the Uyghur diaspora and their strategies to internationally defame the Chinese authorities. In this regard, a central aspect is their internet activities, which resembles “cyber-separatism”. In addition, I depict the actual conditions for non-violent Uyghur separatist activities in the countries adjoining Xinjiang. With the closure of the thesis in chapter 6, I summarize the main aspects of this centre-periphery conflict and present some prospects for Xinjiang.

2.0. Methodological approach: Constructing an applicable research design.

In order to employ an applicable research design for my study, one plausible strategy may be to review Robert K. Yin's seminal work on case study research. His epitomizing contributions help the prospective researcher to comprehend when the case study is the method of choice, and further when it should be renounced. In addition, he illustrated the necessity of a research design which truly links together the initial research questions, empirical testing, and the conducted analysis. Knowledge of these principles is simply of paramount importance for the scientific voyage (1994:18).

The applicable research design is adjusted to the established research questions, the scenery (are central actors' conduct prone to manipulation?), and finally, whether the exploration focuses on contemporary or historical phenomena. Yin argues that case studies are justified as the strategic choice when the phenomena/ actors are contemporary, not easily distinguishable from its context, and not prone to manipulation (1994:1-9). Following Yin's line of reasoning and my area of research (mainly contemporary), the framework of a case study seems suitable for this thesis.

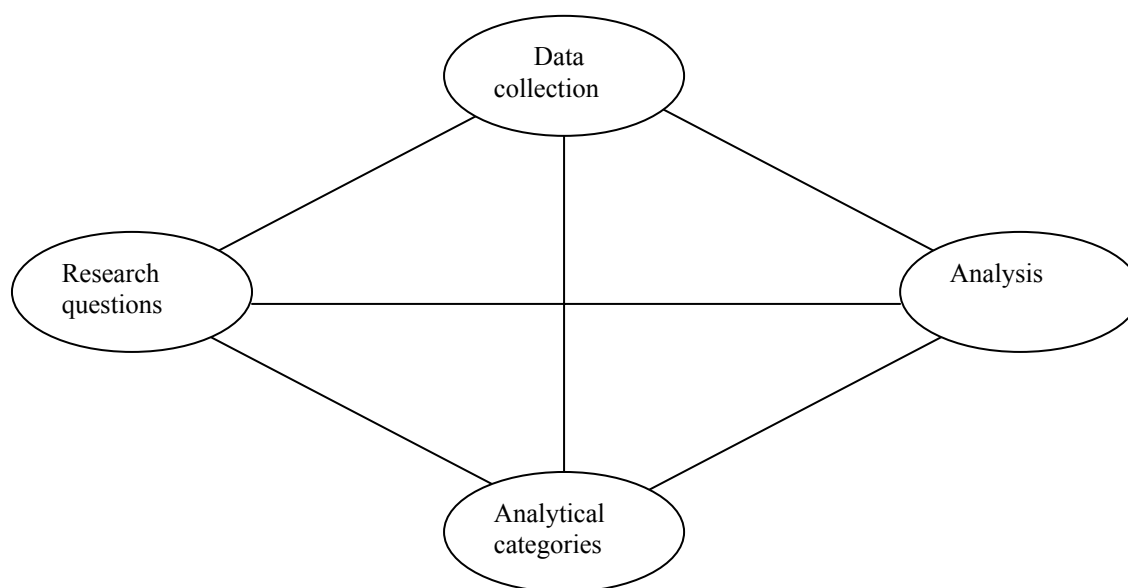
With reference to a definition of case studies and its operational procedures, no common understanding has emerged. John Gerring simply states; "regretfully, the term 'case study' is a definitional morass" (2004:341). Nevertheless, Svein Andersen has provided a suggestive conceptualisation which is applicable for studies of singular-cases as well as comparative-case studies:

1. A-theoretical designs impart the social reality, rather than to develop notions and theories (in a theoretical vacuum).
2. Theory-interpretive designs utilize a theoretical framework to structure the revealed empirical material. Graham T. Allison's "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis", may be illustrative in this regard.
3. Theory-generating designs (Grounded Theory) approach the field with an ambition to reveal theoretical patterns from the data, and thereby develop an inductive theoretical framework, rather than one deducted from *a priori* hypotheses.
4. Theory-developing designs have an inherent purpose to foster generalizations. These designs transform simple theoretical conceptualizations into a more profound theoretical framework, by employing *a priori* deduced set of hypotheses.

In Andersen's 2 x 2 matrix, the first and second approach only have a descriptive purpose in relation to a particular case, whereas the third and fourth approach occupy a generalizing purpose beyond the actual studied case (1997:15,127-128). My approach will be more thoroughly presented in the following subsections, but a singular theory-interpretive case study (2) which employs analytical categories to structure the empirical material, seems to be a plausible strategy.

For analytical purposes and the transparency of the dissertation, my overall scientific approach may be decomposed into the research questions, analytical categories (theory), the data collection, and finally, the analysis. These components enable us to understand the nature of the research design, and illuminate the continuous interrelation between them (King et. al. 1994:13, Engelstad et al. 2000:86)

Figure 1.



2.1. Research questions: Descriptive, normative or constructive questions?

The most critical component about doing case studies relates to the development of the initial study questions, in what Karl Popper referred to as the “context of discovery” (Yin 1993:109, Hovi and Rasch 1996:20-30). Without guidance and direction embodied in the worded questions, the path to observations and knowledge may become hampered and indistinct. Thus, the scientist needs to invest time in the process of creating, introducing and specifying the research questions. In the creating phase, questions mirror the researcher's field of interest and experience. Further, questions

are introduced through a double-dialogue with colleagues and the society. Finally, a specifying process prepares, defines, and concretizes the questions. The research questions addressed in this thesis have previously been prepared in a dialogue with co-students at the University of Oslo, and through a systematic consultation of the available Xinjiang-literature. Hence, an outspoken aspiration with my research questions is to provide some new perspectives to the field of Xinjiang-studies.

Furthermore, what kinds of questions do scientists forward and why?

A. Ascertaining questions (descriptive approach) aspire to unveil information about a previous or current phenomena, and possible courses of development.

B. Appraising (normative) questions approach a social reality with a normative conceptual lens, to reveal the social value of a particular phenomenon.

C. Constructive questions deal with how actors may and should act in order to improve a particular social reality (Engelstad et al 2000:104-115).

In this dissertation, only ascertaining questions have been forwarded, focusing on the previous and actual situation in Xinjiang, and supplemented with some prospects for the future. The personal rationale behind my descriptive approach arises from the notion that this may be a sustainable start for an academic novice. Normative assessments and guidelines for an improvement of a social reality require more academic experience and knowledge about Xinjiang, than I currently possess.

2.2. Analytical categories (theories): A deductive process or inductive theory?

Ever since Glaser and Strauss introduced Grounded Theory in the end of the 1960s, an ongoing debate has taken place between the deductive framework of organizing a study, and Grounded Theory, which is theoretical patterns generated from the field of study. The latter approach criticizes a deductive approximation with its deduced hypotheses and conceptual lenses. Vivian Vaughan follows this line of reasoning; “the paradox of theory is that at the same time it tells us where to look, it can keep us from seeing” (in Andersen 1997:131). Thus, Glaser and Strauss assert that theory should be grounded in the field, not compelled and dictated by an *a priori* theory. The data should make the theory meaningful and not the other way round. In the end, this “would contribute toward closing the embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research” (Strauss and Corbin 1994:257).

Advocates of a deductive approach on the other hand, argue that theories and *a priori* hypothesis are *sine qua non* for the validity and reliability of the conducted research. In a deductive scheme, Popper advocates the composition of daring and falsifiable hypothesis derived from a theoretical framework. This is followed by a critical match-test of the hypotheses against the existing empirical data (Hovi and Rasch 1996:20-30). Moreover, Stinchcombe asserts that a theory is strengthened if a repeated test of the derived hypotheses confirms the initial findings (1968:19-22).

In my survey of the centre-periphery dynamics in Xinjiang, I find it suitable to apply Stein Rokkan's theoretical framework and conceptualisations on state- and nation-building. However, although I employ this theoretical framework prior to my conducted fieldwork, I have not derived any hypotheses for critical testing. My angle of incidence is to provide a general account of the situation in Xinjiang and not specifically testing (falsifying) hypothesis. The "unreliable nature" of information from Xinjiang (as a *terra incognita*), renders it utterly difficult to embark on a process of critical testing. Moreover, I find that Rokkan's perceptive theoretical considerations and keywords are not primarily designed for hypothesis testing, but rather equip the prospective researcher with a more adequate analytical terminology for analysis of centre-periphery relations. This is also why my aspiration is to introduce Rokkan's insights and conceptualizations to a wider audience of Xinjiang-scholars.

2.3. Collecting the data: My preparations and dialogues with the field of study.

Preceding subchapters focused on rationales behind my research questions and the application of a theoretical framework. Fields of focus in this section concern pre-fieldwork preparations and the data collection. Thorough preparations guide the phase of data collection, and with subsection 2.3.1., I briefly illuminate how I proceeded. In subsection 2.3.2., I direct the focus on applied methods for the data collection, and elaborate on my quest for multiple sources of evidence (data triangulation).

2.3.1. Pre-fieldwork preparations: Employing a case study protocol.

The skills required for collecting case study data are much more demanding than those for experiments and surveys [...]. During data collection, only a more experienced investigator will be able to take advantage of unexpected opportunities rather than being trapped by them (Yin 1994:55).

Thorough preparations are thus pivotal for the data collection and Yin advocates the application of an overall research guideline (case study protocol) for these endeavours. Such a protocol may provide the prospective scientist with general procedures and codes of conduct for a stringent operation. A protocol can be organized by the following main sections:

1. A general synopsis, stating the projects purpose, theme and its relevant literature.
2. Procedures in the field, permission/access to important materials/persons/sites.
3. Relevant questions for the case study, which keep the scientist “on track” and provide guidance to the needed information, and for what purpose.
4. A guide for the final rapport and its potential audience, established prior to the data collection (1994:63-74).

At a very early stage in the research process, I obtained the most relevant literature on Xinjiang and was endowed with a solid contextual understanding. This in turn enabled me to develop an overall sketch for my thesis (addressing Yin’s four guiding principles), and moreover illuminated the opportunities and limitations that appeared with my project. As Xinjiang seem to be a *terra incognita* for international scientists, I precluded the option to conduct an overt fieldwork in the region. Hence, I shifted my focus to Uyghur diasporic groups in the countries adjoining China, and eventually found Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to be of particular interest. Then I met with Semet Abla, the leader of the Norwegian Uyghur committee, who provided me with contextual information about the Uyghur Diaspora and general customs (“do’s and don’ts”). Moreover, he connected me with Uyghur exile leaders in Central Asia and in that sense, resembled William Whyte’s key informant “Doc”, from his seminal study “Street Corner Society” (Yin 1994:84).

At this stage, I started to develop my interview questions, obtained the necessary permissions (visas) well ahead of my departure to Central Asia (and later Xinjiang), and composed principles of discretion for the fieldwork, in order to avoid “the governmental radars” of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. While these regimes are not as repressive against Uyghur separatist sentiments as the PRC government, they still put a significant pressure on the Uyghur expatriate leaders. Thus, I had a responsibility not to further jeopardize these leaders, and this liability extended to the content of my

thesis (not revealing information that may severe their situation). The same considerations applied for my journey to Xinjiang, where I at random encountered Uyghurs willing to talk. In this setting, I never took any notes as the conversations progressed. Only at a later stage, I discretely wrote non-traceable notes.

2.3.2. In dialogue with the field: Various angles of incidence.

To avoid insufficient data in the phase of the analysis, a plausible strategy has been to collect different kinds of data (data triangulation). An old saying, *testis unus, testis nullus*, one source, says really nothing, is a rather strict principle. Nevertheless, different, independent and consistent sources enrich the analysis (Kjeldstadli 1999:178). Yin endorses this as converging patterns of evidence from several sources, may strengthen the validity of the project (1994:92). However, the amount of utilized sources depends on research parsimony, structural restrictions (access), and the scope of the thesis. Notwithstanding these challenges, multiple sources of evidence have been applied, and a distinction can be made between sources accessible from my location in Norway, and those sources situated in Xinjiang, Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), Almaty (Kazakhstan) or elsewhere.

In Norway, I enjoyed unlimited access to a variety of Uyghur expatriate internet sites, along with Chinese White Papers (official statements on the situation in Xinjiang, religious conduct in China, minority rights and so forth) and other online PRC documents. Additionally, I managed to obtain literally all the recent academic literature on Xinjiang. In reference to my fieldwork abroad, I conducted as previously mentioned, several interviews with Uyghur expatriate leaders in Bishkek and Almaty. At a later stage, an observational round trip in Xinjiang provided me with a wide range of first-hand (*in situ*) impressions of the region. Finally, my information collection abroad came to an end as I met with a Hui Chinese scholar in Beijing, whose extensive knowledge of ethnic relations in Xinjiang, shed additional light on my questions.

With a view to the interview setting in Bishkek and Almaty, I conducted conversational and topical interviews. Hence, I operated with questions that were not accompanied by fixed alternatives of reply for the respondent. However, at some questions I employed covert alternatives of response, in order to properly handle the coding/note-taking. Beyond the main questions my conversational structure opened up

for follow-up questions and probes, which ensured more in-depth information. With the words of Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin: "The main questions help you make sure you are answering your research puzzle; the follow-up questions and probes ensures that you get depth, detail, vividness, richness, and nuance" (2005:129). This was especially successful in Bishkek, where I enjoyed simultaneous access to a Norwegian person fluent in Russian, and his Uyghur assistant. Consequently, these conversations were very precise in nature, whereas my interview in Almaty suffered some setbacks, due to my interpreter's poor English. However, a modest knowledge to the Russian language enabled me to cross-check the answers at times of potential misapprehension.

2.4. Data analysis and source reliability: Codes of scientific conduct.

Analysis entails classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into coherent narrative (Rubin and Rubin 2005:201).

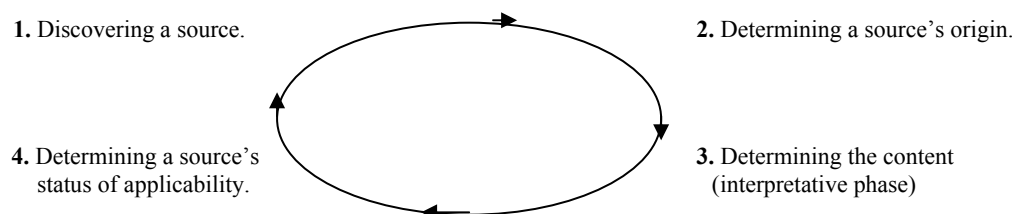
Simultaneously as the prospective investigator embarks on the analysis of content, Starr timely reminds us that the researcher should enforce an inherent scientific scepticism regarding the source's origin. He simply contends that "there is hardly any fact concerning Xinjiang that is so solid, no source of information that is so independent, and no analysis based on such overwhelming evidence that someone does not hotly contest its validity or meaning" (2004:6). The obvious implication of this is that governments, scholars and NGOs in their assessments of Xinjiang, should be aware of potentially exaggerated "victimology" from Uyghurs as well as the PRC government. In particular statements from the Chinese authorities insist on being the "exclusive representative of reality". The book "Xinjiang of China: Its Past and Present", by Chinese Scholars and made available at the PRC embassy in Norway, is illustrative in this regard; "it (the book) has been written on the basis of reality with the purpose of respecting history and clarifying the truth" (2005: Cover).

Another important consideration for the investigator is to scrutinize whether external conditions have influenced the originator's statements. As previously mentioned, Uyghurs situated in Xinjiang generally avoid passing critical remarks on the Chinese authorities, due to a fear of retaliations. Expatriate Uyghurs in the

neighbouring countries of China, operate with some restrictions, but nevertheless enjoy greater latitude of expression. Finally, Uyghurs in northern Europe and North America may enjoy extensive freedom of expression and movement. This naturally affects their operations as well as discursive intonation. Although a survey from the Chinese scholar Yang Shengmin has “revealed” that a predominant number of the Uyghurs “are proud of being a Chinese national” and “agree that participating in separatist activities is harmful to the majority of the people” (2006:10, 13), this may still only reflect that the Uyghurs do not dare to unmask their original preferences. Likewise, expatriate Uyghurs may also potentially usurp “the genuine Uyghur voice” abroad, and manipulate it to serve its own political objectives.

With this in mind, Ottar Dahl’s lucid principles for a thorough scrutiny of the employed sources, seem to provide an adequate starting point for the researcher (1973:48-52).¹⁹

Figure 2.



These components operate in a reciprocal action and may be applied for all kinds of sources. Provided that the investigator automatically exposes newly acquired sources to this rigid process, it may arguably be possible to decrease the gap between the actual course of event and the account of this event. Thus, to reveal “*wie es eigentlich gewesen*” as Lepold von Ranke once put it (Powell 1990: XV).

¹⁹ The illustration is my own, based on Dahl’s insights.

3.0. Theoretical framework: The dynamics of state- and nation-building.

Recollecting my research questions in brief, this study directs at the centre-periphery interactions between the Chinese authorities and the indigenous Uyghurs in Xinjiang. This complex and multidimensional relationship is evidently marked by diverging *modi operandi* and aspirations. Consequently, this thesis surveys the PRC authorities' state building campaigns (external territorial demarcation and internal structuring) and their nation-building endeavours (external cultural boundary-demarcation and internal cultural standardizations). Moreover, I scrutinize the peripheral Uyghur counter-cultures, whose ambitions and actions to undermine the PRC state- and nation-building machinery, enables one to study a classical centre-periphery conflict in display. In this regard, I find the perceptive works of Albert O. Hirschman, Stein Rokkan and Stefano Bartolini, to provide a suitable theoretical basis for the analysis.

3.1. State formation: External boundary-demarcation and internal structuring.

“The history of each territory is essentially the history of successes or failures in the conflict between boundary-reduction and boundary-accentuation” (Rokkan 1999:103).

In his theorizing of state formation, Rokkan thus directed his main focus at processes of boundary-demarcation and the inherent tension between initiatives of boundary-reduction and initiatives of boundary-accentuation. The keyword for his overall study is thus boundaries. In this regard, the effectiveness of the centre-elites' state building efforts depends upon whether they possess adequate “technologies” capable of controlling various boundary transactions. Concerning a polity's territorial borders, this implies a prevailing state where their coercive agencies have a certain capacity to prevent undesirable “entries” or “exits”. Otherwise, these borders would simply be “lines on the map” (a totally open society) as Rokkan put it (1999:103, 109).

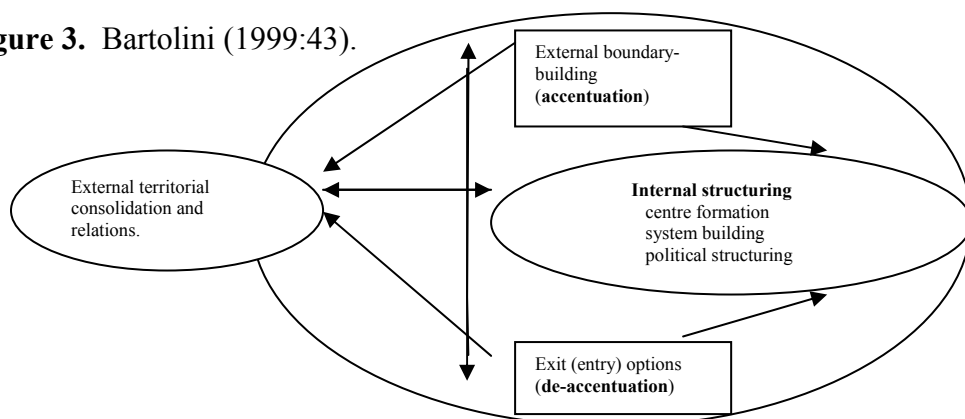
In the ongoing process of polity formation and consolidation, Rokkan then identified two intertwined dynamics; a centre's **external-boundary demarcation** (gradually foreclosing spatial boundaries by confining member exits/ entrance of non-members) and **internal structuring** (hierarchy and differentiation of member's roles/ titles/ privileges) (Flora 1999:8). By establishing coercive agencies, the governing centre-elites thus aspire to *de jure* monopolize and legitimize their operations to exert effective threats of violence (their *ultima ratio*, decisive argument), both outwards and

inwards (domestication) (Flora 1992:87). Max Weber illustrated this crucial link with his threefold definition of a political formation as; “**1)** any hierarchically structured organization for the maintenance of order; **2)** within a defined geographical area; **3)** through the use and the threat of physical coercion” (Bartolini 1999:1).

The link between a polity’s external territorial consolidation and its internal political structuring evidently has a solid “pedigree” in the study of state formation. In the analysis of these processes, it is required to survey both the centre-building elites’ efforts to “lock-in” peripheral actors and resources in a bounded social system (domesticating their strategies), and the diverging forces of transcendence/ movement (boundary-de-accentuation) (Bartolini 1999:1-3, Ferrera 2003:3). More precisely, the process of “locking-in” refers to mechanisms (“carrots and sticks”) employed by the centre-building elites’ to enforce their subjected population to consume “territorial public goods” (member rights, privileges and obligations). This is in reality a set of boundaries which distinguish between the “ins” and “outs”, provided that the centre possesses technologies capable of preventing undesired transcendence (“exit”) or penetration (“entry”) of their bounded system (Bartolini 1999: 7-11).

With figure 3, Bartolini conceptualized the relationship between a polity’s external boundary-demarcation and internal structuring (I have slightly modified it). The core of his argument is that these processes can be seen as functions of each other (reciprocal influence). This also extends to the relationship between boundary-building (accentuation) and forces of movement (de-accentuation), as for instance the increased capacity of a centre to hold transcendence at bay, weakens peripheral forces aspiring to break away from the centre’s domain. Thus, one may read the scheme along “any of the arrows indicated” (not fixed between dependent and independent variables) (1999:1-3).

Figure 3. Bartolini (1999:43).



A more comprehensive assessment of processes of boundary-demarcation and its tension (accentuation versus de-accentuation) will be presented later. Now I proceed to survey the concept of “distance” and its inherent centre-periphery polarity.

3.2. Centre-periphery interactions: Spatial- and non-spatial distances (spaces).

Rokkan asserts that the concept of distance comprises geographical, social, cultural and political differences, and thus, he refers to both spatial distance and socio-cultural distance. For analytical purposes, Rokkan then makes a distinction between two main types of distance; **a)** geographical space and **b)** membership space (socio-cultural distance between the ins” and “outs”). He points out that the membership space and its boundary to “entry” is “much firmer than the geographical boundary” (1999:104).

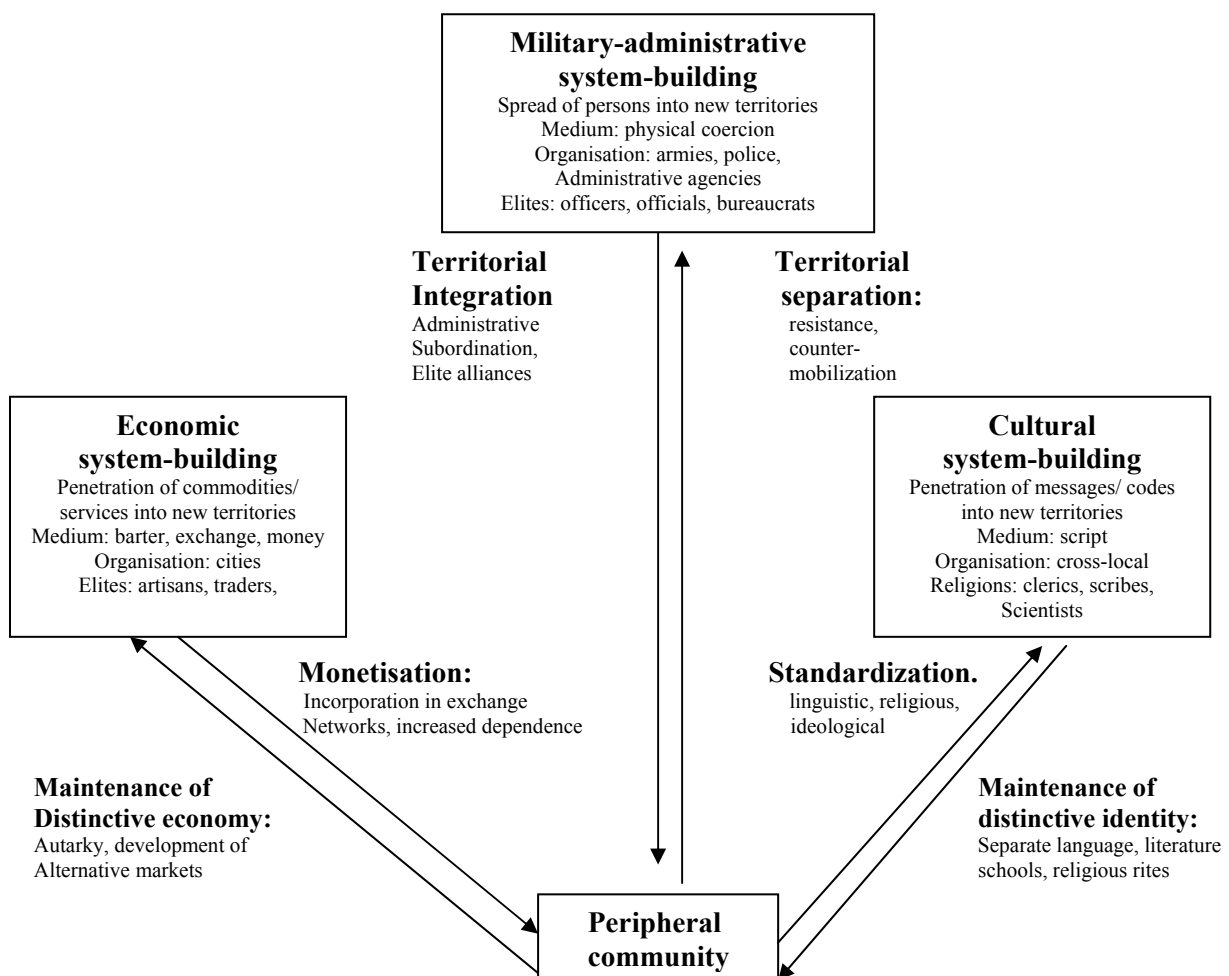
Linking this insight to my study, an implication could be that while the PRC authorities manage to obtain military-administrative control in Xinjiang (employing what I characterize as “technologies of deterrence” towards external threats and “locking-in technologies/mechanisms” to domesticate the people in Xinjiang), they may nevertheless struggle to weaken Uyghur’s primordial boundaries and cultivate an overall Chinese identity (nation-building). With Rokkan’s word, this would imply a state where the PRC authorities’ “boundary-transcending/penetrating technologies” (attempts of boundary-de-accentuation) manage to overcome the periphery’s boundary-maintaining counter-forces (accentuation) in the sphere of force, but not in the firmer non-spatial membership sphere (Rokkan 1999:103).

Continuing to survey distance, the following question emerges; which main features can be attributed to centres and peripheries? In brief, centres are privileged locations, exerting control over major flows of transaction and information within a given territory. A distinct trait is its proximity to collective decision-making processes, which congregate the dominant actors. Rokkan distinguished between three sets of resource holders/ progressive centres; **a)** economic centres for barter of commodities/ services and other transactions (headquarter of major economical institutions), **b)** cultural centres (messages/codes/rites for religious and educational activities), **c)** military-administrative centres (personnel, central ministries, courts, legislative assemblies) (1999:110). These centres may coincide geographically (monocephalic structure) or be scattered across the territory (polycephalic structure).

In brief, an ideal-type periphery may be contrasted to these centres by the following key traits: **Dependence**, upon one or several of the above-mentioned centres (not controlling their own fate, often endowed with minimal resources to preserve their distinctiveness, a poorly developed economy, often dependent on a single commodity). **Distance** (spatial), often a conquered territory administrated by officials responsive to the territorial centre, rather than the indigenous people of the area. **Difference**, some sense of a separate identity is pronounced (also nurtured by centre-periphery distance and dependence). The ideal typical periphery is comprised by all these key traits, but also actors situated in a spatial centre, may be peripheral to a polity's cultural, economical and political institutions (Flora 1992:88-89, Rokkan 1999:110-11).

Despite peripheries' ideal-typical traits of dependence, distance and difference, they may still attempt by varying degree to counter-mobilize against the centres' system-building initiatives. Rokkan's model below illustrates the multidimensional centre-periphery tension in both spatial and non-spatial spheres (1999:118):

Figure 4. Rokkan: Model for integration and resistance among centres and peripheries.



According to Rokkan, the potential reach (“penetration capabilities”) and scope of centre-initiated thrusts toward peripheries depend on the following conditions:

1. Physical conditions of transportation and communication: The contours of landscapes, the distances across waters, making for higher or lower barriers between areas of settlement. **2. Technological conditions** for movement: Horses, ships, canals, paved roads, later railroads, steamers, planes. **3. Military conditions** for expansion versus retrenchment: Differences in levels of organisation, in skills of strategy and tactics, in the technology of war, all helping to increase or decrease the temptation to conquer territory. **4. Economic conditions** for cross-territory transactions: Differences in resource endowments, in production and in markets, making for higher or lower incentives to barter and to trade. **5. Cultural conditions** of communication: Ethnic affinities or enmities, differences in language, in moral codes, in religion (1999:109).

3.3. Differentiation and the conceptual linking of centres and peripheries.

The previous subchapter illuminated Rokkan’s distinction of different centres and peripheries (figure 4). This distinction was greatly influenced by Talcott Parsons’ “Societies” (1967) with its focus on processes of differentiation within territorial systems. Rokkan reinterpreted Parson’s work and illuminated four basic processes of territorial and functional centre-differentiation: **1. Economic-technological. 2. Military-administrative. 3. Judicial-legislative. 4. Religious-symbolic** (Flora 1992:89).²⁰ Albert Hirschman’s “Exit, voice and loyalty” (1970), was another academic contribution with a profound impact on Rokkan’s theoretical modelling of state- and nation-building. Hirschman, mainly occupied in the sphere of economy, elegantly pinpointed individuals’ alternative courses of actions (“exit” or “voice”, and the mediating “loyalty”) as consumers of products/services, or as members of an organization. Hirschman’s insights enabled Rokkan to observe structures and processes at all levels of society which ensure; **a)** a minimal maintenance of a system (“loyalty”), **b)** some intra-communication within a system and inter-communication between systems (“voice”), and finally, **c)** sources of breakdown/ transcendence of established boundaries (“exit”) (1999:100-101).

²⁰ In some models, Rokkan merged military-administrative differentiation and judicial-legislative differentiation.

Table 1 illustrates Rokkan's macro-conceptual elaborations on Hirschman:

Table 1	Micro Level- Hirschman	Macro level- Rokkan
"Loyalty"	"Loyalty" holds "exit" at bay. When individuals are discontent with an outcome, the strategy is to "voice" demands and hope for an improved situation. Typically there is a higher degree of "loyalty" from members of organizations, than from consumers of products/services. Loyal members often "leave no stone unturned before he resigns himself to the painful decision to withdraw or switch" (Hirschman 1970:82).	"System-formation" : Structural incentives and regulations to stay within the system. System maintenance by cultural integration, where the centre through a chain of succeeding thrusts, attempts to construct a shared system of norms, values and identities (language, "way of life", cultural perceptions etc.). -Rokkan and Hirschman acknowledged the existence of organisations, whose management equate "loyalty" with their members' "silence" (mainly in authoritarian arrangements).
"Voice"	"Voice" has the functioning of alerting a firm or organization of its failing. "Voice" plays a more important part for a member of an organization, than to a consumer of products/services. With the presence of accessible "exit-alternatives", the role of "voice" tends to be undermined, as consumers silently "exit" and thereby make an "entry" into alternative arrangements.	"Political structuring" : Internal communication and political structuring, where oppositional "voices" are legitimized through a chain of locks in democratic regimes (democratization; the dismantling of internal thresholds for participation): 1. Legitimizing (allowed to express "voice" without sanctions). 2. Incorporation in the system (participant rights). 3. Representation in law giving assemblies. 4. Executive power access (Rokkan 1987: 274-275). In authoritarian regimes like China, "voice" has been restricted and institutionalized by the principle of Democratic Centralism.
"Exit"	Individual transcendence of a boundary. Provided that the expected outcome is not met after purchasing a product/ service or holding a membership in an organisation, the individual might chose to leave or stop consuming a particular brand/service ("exit"). The threat of "exit" is a member's most "potent weapon". ²¹	"Centre-formation" : The establishment of boundaries to "lock-in" actors and resources in a polity, versus "breakdown", manifested by the transcendence of some boundary. An "exit" is always followed by an "entry" into an alternative arrangement, which in the hypothetical event of a territorial breakaway of Xinjiang, would imply the "entry" into an East Turkistan state.

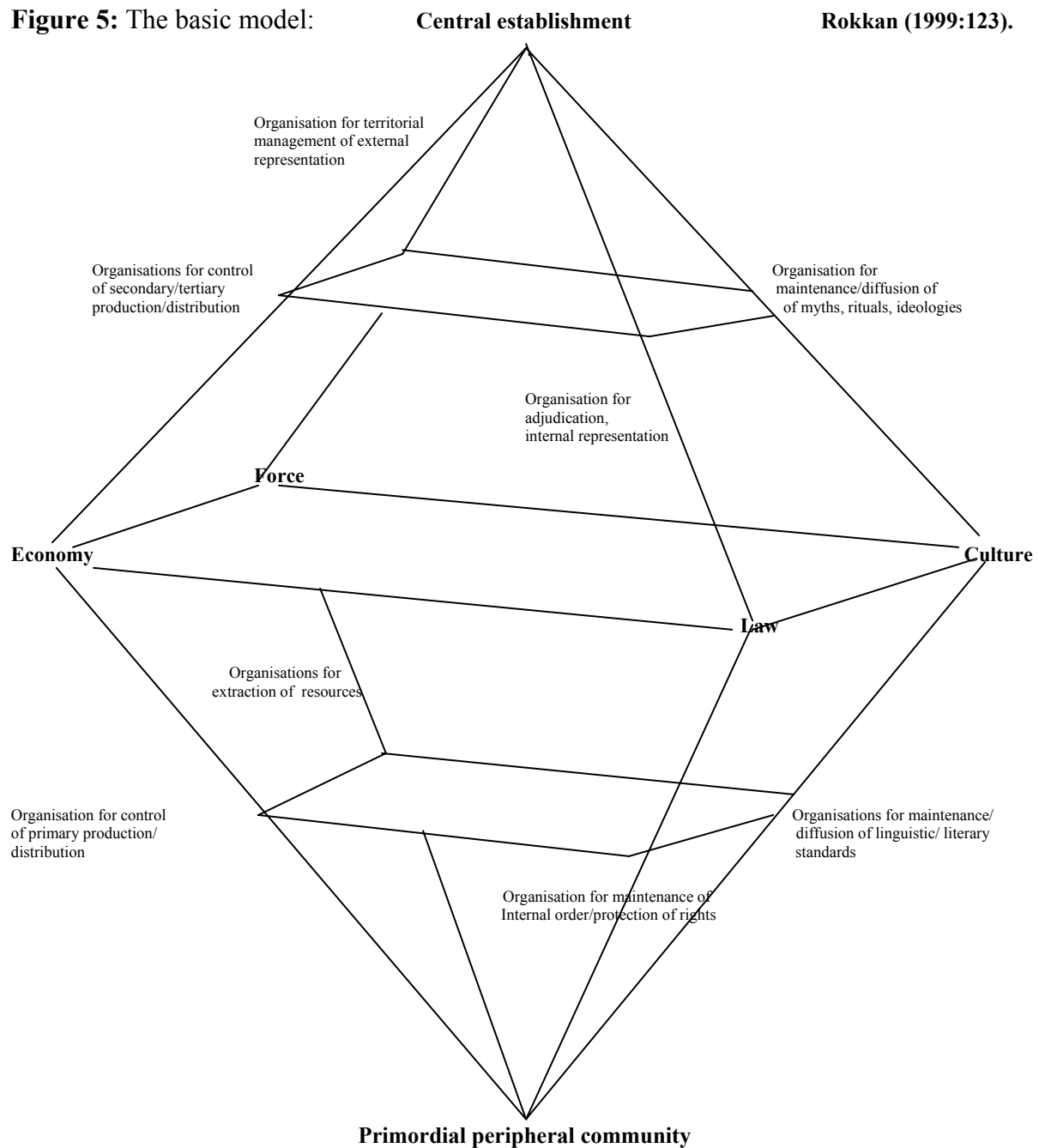
General Sources: Hirschman 1970, Rokkan 1973, 1987, 1999, Flora 1999, Bartolini 1999.

Intrigued by these observations, Rokkan aspired to fusion Hirschman's innovative classification of decision systems, with Parson's insights on differentiation. The result was a complex model (figure 5) where primordial peripheral communities became linked with differentiated central communities, through the channels of force, culture, law and economy. The dialectics of **order** (centres' "locking-in" of resources and actors), and **movement** (boundary-breakdown/transcendence, succeeded by an "entry" into other entities), were incorporated into this model. The focal point of study was thus the continuous tension between processes of order and movement, within a centre-periphery paradigm (Rokkan 1974: 49, Flora 1992:92, 96). Einar Berntzen and Per Selle assert that Rokkan with his adaptation to Hirschman, moved from closed

²¹ In succeeding articles like "Exit, Voice, and the state" (1978) and "Exit, Voice, and the fate of the German Democratic Republic (GDR)" (1993), Hirschman focused more on the state and dynamics between "exit" (out-migration) and "voice". He discovered that while his previous conceptualisations had accounted for a diversity of experiences in economic and social life, it nevertheless had some defects. In preceding works, he depicted a negative relationship between "exit" and "loyalty", where the presence of accessible "exit-alternatives" tended to eliminate the incentive for discontent individuals, to "voice" their grievance. Hence, "exits" were typically imprinted in silence, but this notion has been rejected by studies of political activists' out-migration (1993:175-77). "Voice" and "exit" have typically worked in tandem as it did in GDR in 1989, and in my own study of Uyghur expatriates, where "exits" from Xinjiang territory, has been accompanied by an intense "voice" to defame the Chinese authorities at the international arena.

models imprinted in traits of permanency (*a priori* given and closed boundaries) to more open and dynamic models, with the continuous construction-reconstruction of boundaries (1988:251). With the three-dimensional figure 5 (it has a “kinship” with figure 4, as they both illustrate the centre-periphery link) and table 2, Rokkan outlined this continuous tension (order versus movement) and consequently, provided an illustration of his theoretical fusion of Hirschman and Parson (1999:123,125).²²

Figure 5: The basic model:



²² Rokkan expressed that the model “is essentially a device for the ordering of questions and data about similarities and differences among historically given political systems”. Thus, it enables us to observe the centre-periphery dynamics through four main dimensions (1999:124).

Table 2. Hirschman and Parson combined (Rokkan 1999:125).

Periphery- Centre balance	Force	Culture	Law	Economy
Degree of Periphery Integration: Entry variables , Potentially Voice variables	Strenght of extractive agencies, extent of opposition to such agencies	Strenght of standardising agencies vs. strength of counter- agencies	Strenght of centre-imposed vs. local/regional legal traditions	Integration/ separation of primary economy
Degree of centre dist- inctiveness: Exit variables	Balance on internal vs. external resources of military agencies (alliances, territorial 'temptations')	Distinctiveness vs. shared- ness of religious and/or linguistic standards	Distinctiveness vs. shared- ness of territorial legal system	Openness vs. closedness of territorial economy
Over-time processes of system-building: Loyalty variables	Penetration: State building stricto sensu	Standardisation: Nation-building	Equalisation of rights of participation: Political citizenship	Redistribution of resources/benefits: Social citizenship

Moreover, table 3 in a more detailed fashion, depicts strategies employed by the centre-building elites to “lock-in” a periphery’s resources and actors (generating behavioural conformity), and potential strategies of counter-mobilization for the latter:

Table 3. Exit options and boundary building (Bartolini 1999: Appendix table 1.4.)

	Exit option units	Boundary building mechanisms
Economy	-goods -services -tourists -corporations -investors -customers	-embargoes -tariffs -labour-market controls -credit/capital controls -nationalisation of economy
Culture	-messages, news -styles, ideas -fashion, fads -scribes, scientists -religious/ideological orders -intellectuals -missionaries	-prohibition -censorship -loyalty-building rites/symbols -control of socialising agencies -nationalisation of culture
Politico- administrative (functional regimes)	-voters -candidates -legal claimants (judges/cases) -sub-state governments -students -welfare recipients	-protection of citizenship -national specific social rights -professional credential control -national jurisdiction -national educational title system
Force(coercion/ extraction)	-soldiers/armies -police -spies -underground movements -organized crime -tax -territorial secession	-territorialisation of defence -territorialisation of policing -borders control -territorial extraction system -restriction on residence -restrictions on travelling

These four dimensions of boundary-demarcation have tended to overlap and coincide in the European context (the emergence of nation-states). Hence, crossing a state’s territorial border has also entailed an “entry” into alternative arrangements of coercion, economical markets, cultural communities, welfare system, educational

doctrines, and legal jurisdiction (Bartolini 1999:13-14, 2006:5-6).²³ Rokkan employed these four fundamental processes of system building for his study of political formation in Europe.²⁴ Moreover, he suggested four time phases attached to these processes (thrusts), which in principle could be applied to “Western as well as non-Western” cases of study. The first and second thrusts are initiated from the centre toward the periphery, while the third and fourth thrusts embody internal restructuring and increased “legitimate” involvement of the periphery (while China has some redistributive arrangements (4), the channels for active participation (3) seems limited).

1. State building *stricto sensu*, the establishment of a centre (centres), which penetrates and gain military-administrative control of a surrounding territory. Central repressive and extractive agencies are assigned to provide a common defence of the polity, regulate resource extractions, and maintain internal order/ dispute-settlements.

2. Nation-building refers to processes where the centre provides a cultural demarcation outwards and cultural standardisation within the polity. Thus, they initiate processes to increase the national awareness, which is embodied by compulsory schools (presenting standardized perceptions on the nation-state’s history, often one *lingua franca* penetrating throughout the territory, common religious cultural and religious rites) conscript armies, a nationalised mass media, and communication channels between the central elite and the population situated in the peripheries.

3. Active participation, where socio-political movements enter the system and eventually transform the participants into political citizens (“within exit”; from pacified to activated). In these processes of democratization (dismantling internal thresholds), Rokkan presented the following chain of thresholds (1987:274-275):

- A. Legitimizing (latitude of expressing “voice” without sanctions).
- B. Incorporation in the system (participant rights).
- C. Representation in law giving assemblies.
- D. Executive power access.

4. Redistributive arrangements with a nation-wide scope (public welfare systems; partly equalisation of economic conditions through socio-economic solidarity between better-off strata and poorer segments) (Rokkan 1999:131-134).

²³ Bartolini’s fascinating studies of EU’s formation (integration and broadened jurisdiction) have however illuminated a weakening of the nation-states’ distinctiveness, and at some levels a re-demarcation by extending the scope to a Euro-polity (economical, jurisdictional, cultural, military overlapping arrangements) (1999, 2006).

²⁴ Rokkan was inspired by the Almond-Pye committee’s comparative studies of political systems and six long-term development-phases/“crisis” (Flora 1992: 118-119).

3.4. Non-spatial boundaries and perceptions of collective identities.

Rokkan's explanatory schemes and models incorporated both geographical and socio-cultural factors as underpinnings of political territoriality. Thus, Hans Vollard asserts that he avoided the "territorial trap", where geographical factors alone illuminate the dynamics of exit-options, voice-arrangements and authority regarding structuring/de-structuring of polities (2005:3-5). This has been illustrated with preceding subchapters in the passages of "distance" (centre-periphery) and polity-formation (differentiation).

However, while Rokkan to some extent depicted "nation-builders", mobilized peripheral counter-cultures, and constellations of collective identities/ belief-systems (socio-cultural boundaries), the potential and necessity for a more extensive assessment is evident. In this regard, Stefano Bartolini perceptively elaborated on Rokkan's dialectic of order-movement and masterfully incorporated the insights on collective identities, inter-group interactions and perceptions of social mobility, into his analysis of boundaries. These reflections are simply invaluable when analysing and comprehending the potential reach and scope of the PRC's overt and covert policies, toward the Uyghurs in Xinjiang (aspiring to impair their distinctiveness (boundary-reduction/de-accentuation) and strengthen an overall Chinese identity).

Bartolini employs Bernhard Giesen and Shmuel Eisenstadt's volume "The construction of collective identity" (1995) as a starting point in his analysis of collective identities and permeability. In this regard, Giesen and Eisenstadt distinguished between three major codes of collective identity (Bartolini 1999:24-25):

1. Primordial elements as indicators of identity, with "permanent"/unchangeable characteristics such as gender, ethnicity (race), generation and kinship. Primordial collectives do not have any missionary agenda. "The others are not guilty of wrong choice- simply, they cannot be educated or convinced, converted or adopted" (1999:24). Thus, these boundaries are settled and not prone to transcendence.

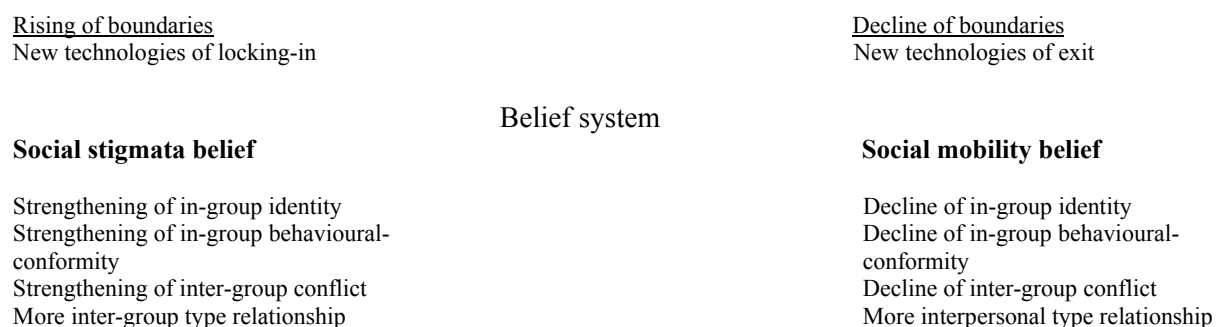
2. Conversely, civility codes (boundaries) are more permeable where an outsider may be accepted, provided that the local practices and institutional arrangements are adopted and not questioned. More precisely, this refers to the outsider's acceptance of a community's social practice (behavioural rules, traditions, rites and so forth.), which is regarded as the nucleus of their collective identity.

3. Cultural (or sacredness) collective identity is universalistic in its orientation, with a missionary agenda. Hence, boundaries can be crossed by communication, reorientation and education. An “entry” into their “way of life” is rendered possible by reorientation and adoption of their “superior” normative standards.

While Giesen and Eisenstadt’s distinction of collective identities may indicate various focal points for transcending demarcated social boundaries, additional insight may be provided by reviewing social psychologists’ comments on the potential reach and scope of group behaviour. In this respect, Tajfel and Turner contrast interpersonal behaviour versus intergroup behaviour. Interpersonal behaviour refers to an interaction fully determined by individual traits (not affected by belonging to a social group), whereas intergroup behaviour refers to an interaction fully determined by the influence of a social group (their codes of conduct), upon its members. Bartolini notes that the scope (level of intensity) of an intergroup-conflict, is more extensive where individual interaction can be traced back to their group belonging (1999:32-33).

Another important distinction can be made regarding individuals’ perception of a society as “open” (social mobility) or “closed” (social group stigmata). In the case of Xinjiang, a question is whether Uyghurs experience that positions in the labour market and the Communist Party are accessible /permeable (social mobility), or out of reach due to their minority background (group stigmata). Bartolini asserts that intergroup (unitary) behaviour and within-group loyalty is fostered by the latter perception. Conversely, social mobility beliefs foster greater in-group variability toward members of the outer-group, and thus, a decreased level of tension. Below is a figure originally by Bartolini, which I have slightly modified in order to illustrate the dynamics of group belief systems and group structures (1999:32-34):

Figure 6. Group structure rigidity/permeability



Summing up in brief, Bartolini linked notions of group identity and its dynamics (codes of collective identities, inter-group interaction, perceptions on socio-economical prospects and so on), with conceptualizations of boundaries (“exit”/“entry”). His contribution may especially enable the prospective researcher to more thoroughly assess the PRC’s “penetration capabilities”, regarding their ability to weaken and transcend distinctive Uyghur markers (membership space: non-spatial boundaries). Moreover, to identify which spheres Uyghur counter-cultures mobilize most intensively in, along with potential outcomes of this interaction. By incorporating these insights with Rokkan’s overall state- and nation-building framework, the researcher may be endowed with conceptual tools to conduct a comprehensive analysis, covering all the major aspects of Xinjiang’s centre-periphery dynamics.

Hence, at this stage it might be plausible to provide a refinement of my research questions (previously forwarded in section 1.2.), into a more distinct Hirschmanian-Rokkanian “exit”, “voice”, “loyalty”-jargon. This recapturing may also be helpful for the reader, before the subsequent chapters unfold.

In the process of external boundary-demarcation (confining member “exit”/ non-member “entry”) of Xinjiang territory and its internal structuring (hierarchy and differentiation of roles/titles/privileges), which main strategies can be ascribed to the Chinese authorities? Moreover, which “technologies of transcendence (“exit”)” do expatriate as well as domestic Uyghur movements employ, to hamper these processes of centre formation (state building)?

In the cultivation of a broader Chinese identity (nation-building to generate regime-“loyalty” and weaken primordial Uyghur boundaries), how do the authorities regulate the Uyghur “voice”, regarding their practice of Islam, distinct language and cultural expression? Likewise, what kind of strategies do Uyghur counter-cultures (Uyghur nation-builders) in Xinjiang as well as expatriate Uyghurs employ, in order to demarcate and strengthen their traits of distinctiveness (membership space)?

Chapter 4:

PRC state- and nation-building in Xinjiang.



Photo Truls Winje: This enormous statue in Khotan eternalizes Chairman Mao's meeting with the electric worker Kurban Turum in 1959. Allegedly, Turum set off from Khotan to Beijing on a donkey, to present Mao with dried fruits. When he eventually reached Urumqi, the CCP apparatus flew him to meet Mao in Beijing.

4.0. Chinese state- and nation-building in Xinjiang (1949-2007).

Recollecting the introduction of Xinjiang's history in chapter 1, the region has throughout the course of history attracted a variety of politico-religious formations, aspiring to dominate the territory and its indigenous people. Prospective candidates for an all-embracing control of Xinjiang, have encountered a wide range of challenges, and I argue, been in need of acquiring the following capabilities: Sufficient regime-loyal manpower, equipped with "technologies of deterrence" toward external as well as domestic threats; sustainable transportation axes ensuring a stable flow of crude materials, manufactured goods and relief/enforcement of manpower; and finally, a perceptive strategy to attach legitimacy to the centre's operations, and if possible, generate a collective notion à la one "Manifest Destiny" (cultivating a group identity).

With the inception of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and Xinjiang as an inseparable part of this arrangement, the communist authorities embarked on an ambitious project to "tame the region's wildness". The following subchapters survey the centre-building communist elite's endeavours to "lock-in" peripheral resources/actors by external boundary-demarcation and internal structuring. The presentation furthermore accounts for a significant barrier to the PRC's state- and nation-building endeavours; the mobilization of Uyghur counter-cultures.

4.1. State building in Xinjiang: External demarcation and internal structuring.

Xinjiang was peacefully liberated on September 25, 1949. As the liberation struggle gained momentum across the country and the revolutionary struggle of the people of all ethnic groups surged forward in Xinjiang [...] (they) welcomed [...] the Chinese People's Liberation Army [PLA]. The people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang greeted the founding of the People's Republic of China together with the rest of the Chinese people on October 1, 1949 (Xinjiang White Paper 2003).²⁵

When the PLA forces entered Xinjiang in 1949, this heralded an era of all-embracing PRC state building in the region. In this respect, the PLA and from 1954, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp (Bingtuan), became instrumental in the government's endeavours to effectively demarcate PRC-boundaries outwards and maintain order inwards. These "boundary-penetrating technologies" (and later "technologies of consolidation"), have simply been of vital importance for Beijing's

²⁵ PRC Embassy (2003). "History and development of Xinjiang" (part 3). White Paper.

ongoing operations in Xinjiang. Thus, my focus is inevitably directed at these centre-vectors' procedures and capabilities, to operate effectively in this vast region.

Moreover, I briefly survey their partaking in Xinjiang's historical junctures (1949-2007), involving on the one hand disputes with neighbouring countries (especially between 1960 and 1990), and on the other, the emergence of large-scale internal uprisings and even acts of terrorism (particularly in the 1990s). The latter incidents and the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991 greatly altered the Chinese authorities' threat perception. From then on, the government tightened their grip in Xinjiang and simultaneously aspired to establish good relations (converging threat perceptions), and reciprocal frontier demarcation-agreements with their neighbouring countries. Hence, a major strategy was to prevent these countries from facilitating exile Uyghur activities on their own soil, by embarking on regional integration and bilateral arrangements. This will be accounted for in detail later.

Finally, I address another recent state building campaign; "Open up the West", which have focused on: **a)** infrastructural developments and **b)** settler colonization. The expansion of arterial highways and rail-road systems has been initiated to penetrate more profoundly into "Uyghur heartland" southwards. Moreover, the PRC authorities have conducted large-scale extractions of oil, gas and coal, which have been simply alluring to scores of migrating Han-Chinese. With these infrastructural developments deeper into Xinjiang, the government has also ensured that Han settlers have followed along, and as such, strengthened their hold vis-à-vis the Uyghurs.

4.1.1. State building: PLA and the Bingtuan as paramount vectors of the centre.

When the PLA moved into Xinjiang in 1949, they embarked on a comprehensive task of external boundary-demarcation, with 5,400 kilometres of borderland (adjoining what today are eight countries). Guomindang forces (about 80,000) and other local forces (about 25,000) were absorbed into the PLA (100,000) and thus, the armed forces altogether comprised about 200,000 soldiers. Their main assignment was to root out internal threats and deter potential external aggressors, something that they seemingly managed to do within a relatively short period (Shichor 2004:132).

In these founding days of the PRC, the government cultivated peaceful coexistence with their neighbouring countries, and the Soviet Union was not

considered to be a military threat, although borderlines were unsettled and some mutual mistrust survived (2004:137). Hence, much energy was invested inwards by eliminating potential national enemies of the regime (converting local leaders into loyal CCP cadres).²⁶ By and large, the regime managed to establish and maintain control in the region, at the expense of warlord rivalry and shifting alliances.

At this stage, the most prominent leaders in Xinjiang had dual roles, possessing senior posts within the Party, as well as prominent roles within the PLA. Wang Zhen and Wang Enmao embodied this at the beginning of the 1950s, and were instrumental in the demobilization of military units into the paramilitary Bingtuan. Wang Zhen then moved on to more senior posts, whereas Wang Enmao became Xinjiang's cadre *par excellence*, until he was forced out during the Cultural Revolution (Dillon 2004:77-8).

Textbox 1. The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (Bingtuan).

The corps serves as a powerful colonizing force, reclaiming land to settle new immigrants [...] securing the territory with a string of cities, farm complexes and industries; attracting demobilized soldiers to settle in Xinjiang; and consolidating territorial control (Becquelin 2004:367).

The Bingtuan was officially established in 1954, and composed of demobilized Guomindang (GMD-Nationalist), Ili National Army (INA), PLA soldiers and criminals, who were redeployed into the semi-military working corps of the Bingtuan (Toops 2004b:246). Viewed through a “Rokkanian lens”, the Bingtuan's boundary-consolidating capacity at strategic locations throughout Xinjiang, was simply a *sine qua non* for the government's state building project. At first, the corps embarked on the vast territory with very modest manpower, but at later stages absorbed and administered the massive influxes of Han Chinese for permanent settlement (Bovingdon 2004:26). Hence, Millward and Tursun argue that the Bingtuan was “the direct descendent of Qing-era state farms” (2004:90).

The passage from the Xinjiang White Paper below, illustrates Bingtuan's twofold orientation with its “production and militia duties”, although a focus on “stability and safety” is most evident;

As an important force for stability in Xinjiang and for consolidating frontier defence, the XPCC [Bingtuan] adheres to the principle of attaching equal importance to production and militia duties. It has set up in frontier areas a “four-in-one” system of joint defence that links the PLA, the Armed Police, the XPCC and the ordinary people, playing an irreplaceable special role in the past five decades in smashing and resisting internal and external separatists' attempts at sabotage and infiltration, and in maintaining the stability and safety of the borders of the motherland.²⁷

This principle of simultaneous production and militia duties makes Tyler to ascribe Bingtuan with a persistent “Jekyll-and-Hyde identity” (2003:196). Over the last years, its enterprise activities have accelerated, but as its deputy commander admitted in 1998: “To the outside, it is a business group; internally, it is still the Corps”. In the 1990s, the corps role of enforcing order and counter separatism

²⁶ The leadership of the East-Turkistan Republic (1944-49) were all killed in a mysterious plane-crash and the Uyghur nationalists Muhammad Amin Bughra and Isa Yusuf Alptekin fled to Turkey in 1949. Other leaders were “re-educated” and became communist cadres.

²⁷ PRC Embassy (2003). “History and development of Xinjiang” (part 8). White Paper.

got a major boost (Becquelin 2000:78-80), and this seems to further increase in the post 9/11-era. In this regard, the Chinese scholar Ma Dazheng mentions that while the total population of the Bingtuan is about 2,4 million people, over 1,8 million are situated in the north, and only 600,000 to the South. Hence, he advocates the following layout for the Bingtuan; “maintain the north and strengthen the south”. Only by this procedure can “it live up to its historical mission” (2005:257).

The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps’s current status.

Bingtuan is organised along 14 divisions (reclamation areas), comprising 174 agricultural/stockbreeding farms and around 4,400 industrial, construction, transport and commercial enterprises. Moreover, the corps handles its own judicial system (own justice departments, courts and prisons) and welfare questions (education, hospitals and pension funds) (Ma 2005:251). This makes Tyler depict it as “a state within a state”, reporting directly to Beijing (2003:194).

Regarding China’s external affairs, the relationship to Soviet deteriorated by the late 1950s, at the same time as tensions rose between India and China.²⁸ Thus, the PRC authorities had to simultaneously clamp down on internal sentiments for separatism and externally, deter potential state aggression. Bingtuan was a paramount vector in this respect, as it embarked on a policy of “two circles and one line”. According to Ma Dazheng, the “circles” referred to Bingtuan farms circling the fringes of the Gurbantunggut dessert (north) and Taklamakan dessert (south), while the one “line” referred to the presence of Bingtuan regiments in the border area, ready to counter “Soviet hegemonism” (2005:256). In 1962, mostly Kazakhs and some Uyghur illegally escaped to Soviet and tensions rose as Soviet consulates in Xinjiang were forced into inactivity. From 1966 and onwards, several thousand minor incidents took place, involving Xinjiang’s frontier posts, Soviet troops, and Soviet-sponsored ethnic guerrillas. In 1969, clashes along the border caused heavy casualties, and the PRC government expected an all out attack from their neighbours (Shichor 2004:138-9).

During the 1960s, the deteriorated relationship with the Soviet Union naturally caused great concern, but Wang Enmao also had to deal with a substantial internal threat, the radical Mao-loyal Red Guards, an offspring from the infamous Cultural Revolution (1966-76). In 1964, the PRC triggered their first atomic bomb at Lap Nor’s

²⁸ Michael Dillon argues that the deteriorated Sino-Soviet relation was caused by Khrushchev’s speech in 1956, where he denounced Stalin (perceived by Mao as threatening to his own position). Moreover, Moscow perceived the PRC’s campaign Great Leap Forward and later the Cultural Revolution, with great scepticism (2004:56). Regarding Sino-Indian tensions, this made the PRC government forge a strategic link with Pakistan and they settled their differences over the Kashmir-Xinjiang border. In 1962, Indian troops and Chinese troops frequently clashed, but due to “China’s edge in the region, India has consistently avoided provoking China ever since” (Shichor 2004:136, 143-44).

nuclear installations in Xinjiang, and Wang endeavoured to keep this installation away from the Red Guards. Hence, he established his own Red Guard units (elements from the Bingtuan) and suppressed rival Red Guards. Beijing then ordered Wang to disband his personal units, but as he failed to comply, he was removed at a moment where China feared a large scale attack from Soviet. Moscow did actually contemplate a surgical strike against Lap Nor, but in the end, tensions decreased as both parts agreed in covert conversations to avoid armed confrontations and border-disputes. With Soviet's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and the Chinese offensive against Vietnam, Beijing-Moscow relations once again soured. However, armed confrontations were evaded, although China, in cooperation with the U.S. found it opportune to hamper Soviet's military campaigns in Afghanistan (Tyler 2003:150-1, Shichor 2004:135-149).

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 radically changed the geopolitical environment in the region, and thus, the PRC's threat perceptions. Soviet's natural successor Russia was greatly impaired, and the emerging independent Central Asian states did not constitute any credible threat to the PRC. However, internal problems had started to emerge in Xinjiang, through the rise of ethno-nationalism and general discontent with the PRC government (Becquelin 2000:66).

According to James Millward, Xinjiang witnessed "three clusters of events" in the 1990s, which had a profound impact on the government's regional operations (2004: VIII). With the Baren-uprising nearby Kashgar in 1990, the region slid into a decade of conflict and violence. The PRC apparatus was taken by surprise of this well organized rebellion (logistically supported from abroad), which was embedded in an Islamic ideology. PLA-Bingtuan forces eventually quelled the uprising, but it only came to an end with numerous fatalities and thousands of incarcerated Uyghurs (Tyler 2003:164-5, Millward 2004:14, Dillon 2004:62-64). Secondly, in 1992-93, a series of explosions and bombings at civilian targets (buses, stores and cinemas) caused several fatalities. Thirdly, from the spring of 1996, until the winter months in 1997, Uyghur militants conducted protests, bomb incidents and assassination of Uyghur cadres.

The latter "cluster" corresponded with the inauguration of the Shanghai Five in 1996 (textbox 2), and the initiation of the "Strike hard" anti-separatist campaign. The Ghulja-uprisings (Ili) in 1997, marked the apex of this overt Uyghur "voice" and was a

response to the government's plan of action. As grievance escalated, several hundreds lost their lives, and afterwards, numerous Uyghurs were either convicted to prison or received capital punishment (Millward 2004:15-18, Dillon 2004: 94-98). Later that month, on February 27, memorial ceremonies were held for the departed Deng Xiaping, and Uyghur militants simultaneously triggered off bombs at three Urumqi city-buses(9 fatalities) (Millward 2004:18). While some violent repercussions followed, Gladney observed a marked decline in "civil unrest and so-called separatist events", due to the PRC's hard clampdowns and large scale arrests (2004b:381).

Textbox 2. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

Confronting the "three evil forces of terrorism, separatism and extremism".

At Shanghai Five's inception in 1996, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan assembled (annual summits) to address concerns regarding border control, insurgent Islamic forces, smuggling and so on. An outspoken ambition was to launch a package of tension-reducing efforts including: A non-aggression pact, obligation to inform each other about major military activities near the international boundary line, and exchange of military observers (Dillon 2004:154, 168).

The *raison d'être* for the PRC's involvement was to make these countries clamp down on Uyghur exiles and diasporic "East Turkistan movements", whereas the other countries' main incentive to bandwagon with the PRC, was based on the latter's economical potential. Hence, Sean R. Roberts argues that the other countries were initially reluctant to fight Uyghur separatists, but as "Muslim militancy" increased its visibility, they became more accommodating toward the Chinese authorities (2004:233-34). In June 2001, the Shanghai Five mechanism transformed into a higher level of intergovernmental cooperation as the five countries in addition with Uzbekistan, signed the declaration of Shanghai Cooperation Organization. With the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, a greater emphasis was put on combating the "three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism". This in turn has entailed a state where exiled Uyghurs within the SCO have been more sanctioned.

Moreover, in recent years India, Pakistan, Mongolia and Iran have obtained status as SCO-observer countries and while disagreements and competition still remain among the SCO-countries, separatist sentiments and international terrorism seem to loom larger in their thinking than the potential for external state aggression.

Xinjiang in the aftermath of September 11, 2001: A looming Islamic threat?

On September 2, 2001, Xinjiang Party Secretary Wang Lequan organized a trade fair in Urumqi to attract Chinese and international investors. While acknowledging some acts of separatism in the past, it was emphasized that; "by no means is Xinjiang a place

where violence and terrorist accidents take place very often”. He also noted that the current state was “better than ever in history”.²⁹ Only nine days later, this account was dramatically altered with the incidents on September 11. In the aftermath, the PRC authorities sought to bandwagon with the U.S. in their “War on terrorism”. According to Dillon, they thereby aspired to obtain a *carte blanche* to clamp down on Uyghur “terrorists” in Xinjiang (2004:157). On 18 September, 2001 the PRC’s Foreign Ministry’s Spokesman Zhu Bangzao, made an interesting remark in this regard:³⁰

Question from the press: Does China wish the US to soften its position on China’s handling of the Xinjiang splittism after the terrorist attacks on the United States?

Bangzao: The United States asks for China’s support and assistance in the fight against terrorism. China, in the same token, has reason to ask the United States to give its understanding and support in China’s fight against national splittism and terrorism.

Hence, the Chinese authorities manoeuvred to incorporate Uyghur separatism as an inseparable part of the “War on terrorism”. The previous depiction of “a handful of separatists” was now referred to as “a full-blown terrorist organisation” (Millward 2004:11, Clarke 2005:15). In the Chinese discourse, many Uyghur Muslims were suddenly equated with Islamic terrorists, and when some Xinjiang Uyghurs were discovered on the ground with Taliban in Afghanistan, this profoundly hampered the prospects of moderate Uyghur (Fuller and Lipman 2004:341).³¹ Thus, the Chinese authorities’ threat perception gained momentum, and they found it opportune to clamp down on all kinds of Uyghur dissent, as a part of the broader campaign against international terrorism.³²

On January 21, 2002, the Information Office of the PRC State Council issued the document “East Turkistan Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away With Impunity”, which in a detailed fashion accounted for alleged terrorist acts (quantifying casualties and fatalities) by Uyghur separatist groups. Moreover, as the document’s title implies, the authorities requested frank support from the international community:

²⁹ Human Right Watch (2005). “Devastating Blows and Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang” (2005), and Millward (2004:11).

³⁰ PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2001). “Foreign ministry regular press conference by spokesman Zhu Bangzao”.

³¹ Twenty-two Uyghurs were detained by the U.S. at Guantanamo Bay. However fifteen have been released, and in 2006, five of these were granted political asylum in Albania, to the great dismay of the Chinese authorities (Shichor 2006:107).

³² Human Right Watch (2005). “Devastating Blows and Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang” (2005): “Since September 11, 2001, China has attempted to position its repression of Uighurs as part of the global “war on terror.” By exploiting the climate that followed the attacks on the United States and the fact that some Uighurs were found fighting in Afghanistan, China has consistently and largely successfully portrayed Uighurs as the source of a serious Islamic terrorist threat in Xinjiang”. The annual Amnesty International report from 2005, states: “The authorities continued to use the “global war on terror” to justify harsh repression in Xinjiang, resulting in serious human rights violations against the ethnic Uighur community. The authorities continued to make little distinction between acts of violence and acts of passive resistance”.

The Chinese government opposes terrorism in any form; at the same time it opposes the application of double standards concerning the anti-terrorism issue. Any tolerance or indulgence toward the “East Turkistan” terrorist forces will not harm China and the Chinese people alone. Today, as the international community becomes more clearly and deeply aware of the harm brought about by terrorism, we hope that all peace-loving people throughout the world, regardless of ethnic status or religious belief, region or country, political or social system, will fully recognize the nature of the “East Turkistan” terrorist forces and the serious harm caused by them, see through all their disguises, and jointly crack down on their terrorist activities, leaving not a single opportunity for them to exploit to their advantage.³³

Scrutinizing this document, Millward found several aspects problematic as many small-case incidents (labelled as acts of terrorism or separatism) could simply have been criminal acts. The document was also too vague when it referred to a unified “East Turkistan terrorist organisation” (2004:12-13). The Human Right Watch report “Devastating Blows and Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang”, reasoned along similar lines as it allegedly revealed numerous inconsistencies in the document (2005).

Nevertheless, the PRC managed to convince the U.S. about “East Turkistan terrorism”, and on August 26, 2002, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, announced that the United States had added the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) to its list of terrorist groups. Symbolically, the United Nations announced on September 11, 2002, that it was placing the ETIM on a U.N. list of terrorist organizations, requiring all U.N. members to freeze the group’s financial assets and ban its members from entry.³⁴ A number of international experts assert that this was in fact a “trade off” (tit for tat) between the U.S. and China to; **a**) make China a partner in “War on terrorism”, **b**) improve and stabilize the fragile bilateral relations, and finally, **c**) soften China in the prelude to the Iraq-war (Clarke 2005:12).

About the same time, Shichor was officially invited to Xinjiang to view the 60-minute video documentary “On the Spot Report: The Crimes of Eastern Turkistan Terrorist Power”, “showcasing” irrefutable evidence of terrorist activity. It referred to four main terrorist groups: (1) The Party of Islamic Reformers, (2) The Allah Party of East Turkistan, (3) The Eastern Turkistan Liberation Organization and (4) The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement. But as Shichor remarked: “At best, they are – or were – small and loosely organized of little operative value. At worst, they may have been a

³³ PRC State Council (2002): “East Turkistan Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away With Impunity”.

³⁴ Dumbaugh, Kerry (2003). “China–US Relations”. Issue Brief for the U.S. Congress.

figment of Chinese imagination or even invented by Beijing” (2006:102). Although Shichor acknowledges the presence of some Uyghur violence/ acts of terror, the numerous inconsistencies in their documentation, simply impair the PRC’s credibility.

On December 18, 2003, the People’s Daily published the article ”Combating terrorism, we have no choice”, with a list of “Eastern Turkistan” terrorist organisations issued by China’s Ministry of Public Security.³⁵ (1) The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), (2) The Eastern Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO), (3) The World Uyghur Youth Congress (WUYC) and (4) The Eastern Turkistan Information Center (ETIC). Zhao Yongchen at the Ministry's Counter-Terrorism Bureau; “called on the authorities in all countries to disband the four organizations, to ban their activities, support, financing and protection of these organizations and to freeze their assets”. From the issued list in the 2002-documentary, only ETIM and ETLO figure on the list from 2003. Regarding the non-mentioned groups, Shichor asks in a rhetoric manner: “Are these terrorist organizations or not?” (2006:102).

Concerning the question whether East Turkistan Islamic groups constitute a genuine threat to the PRC or are “figments of Chinese imagination”, Kenneth George Pereire from the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS), argues that ETIM in particular is a genuine threat, with an evident link to al-Qaeda. Thus he notes;

Al-Qaeda and other global jihadist groups will continue to work with ETIM and with other Uighur groups. In the not too distant future, there is a possibility that ETIM may even adopt suicide tactics in China. Unless the Uyghur grievances are addressed, the potential for greater radicalisation of the Uyghur conflict along the Islamic path can pose a real challenge to the Chinese government.³⁶ (2006).

On January 8, 2007, China Daily published an article which claimed that the local police had destroyed an ETIM-terrorist camp in South Xinjiang. Allegedly, the police killed 18 terrorist and captured 17, along with their weapons.³⁷ Whether this incident actually took place is a plausible question, but in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the PLA, Bingtuan and the People’s Armed Police Force, have nonetheless been increasingly attentive to deal with new “threats”. However, Beijing’s deployment of

³⁵ Peoples Daily (2003). “Combating terrorism, we have no choice”.

³⁶ In particular, Pereire is concerned about a video released in 2006, entitled “Jihad in Eastern Turkistan”. The video allegedly displays Uyghur militants from ETIM along with their weapons and training methods, the World Trade Centre incidents, and finally, it showcases their enemy, embodied by Xinjiang’s number one communist cadre, Wang Lequan. Another similar video with about the same content is accessible at <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=subjects&Area=jihad&ID=SP135206>. I have also come across the alleged homepage for the Islamic Party of Turkistan, which calls for Jihad against the PRC and displays photos of their sabotage acts in Xinjiang. This is accessible at <http://www.tipislamvultuzi.com/mazmun/summary/summary.html>.

³⁷ China Daily (2007). “Police destroy terrorist camp, killing 18”.

proper trained soldiers in the region is still modest, with about 50,000 to 60,000 PLA troops, according to Shichor (2004:123). Moreover, he asserts that their “relatively shallow military presence in Xinjiang, both in quantity and definitely in quality”, reflects that “Beijing firmly controls Xinjiang and does not perceive any real, serious or immediate “terrorist” threat to its national security in the northwest” (2006:107).

Martin Andrew argues against the latter depiction as Xinjiang’s new infrastructure (oil refineries, pipelines, railways and power stations) is vulnerable to sabotage by insurgents. Thus, he asserts that the PRC security forces have displayed their force in order keep insurgency in check. Additionally, Andrew asserts that Xinjiang is a prioritized region, due to its function as testing ground to develop military equipment and techniques for high altitude warfare (2005). One may also add another aspect which arguably has been an incentive for a strengthened presence of the PLA and Bingtuan in Xinjiang; the “entry” of the U.S. into the Central Asian region.

Indisputably, with the latter’s presence in Afghanistan and the rapprochement by Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (allowing U.S. military bases at their territory), China was eclipsed and lost momentum in the “new Great Game” of Central Asia. The U.S.-led “War on terrorism” removed Taliban and “an alleged sanctuary for Islamic militants in Central Asia”, but at great cost; China was no longer in headship of their own “backyard” (Clarke 2005:12-13, 19). From a geopolitical point of view, the U.S. was still perceived as a competitor, and as unlikely as it sounds; in a “worst case scenario”, it posed a threat to their territorial integrity in Xinjiang. Shichor is naturally aware of this situation, and asserts that the presence of U.S. forces is especially of concern if the “the situation in the Taiwan Strait deteriorates”. Then the U.S. “would not simply [be] a challenge but also an additional front” (2004:160).

Consequently, it became imperative for China and Russia (also eclipsed by the U.S. in their “near abroad”) to increase the relevance of the SCO. On the agenda were military rapprochement (joint exercises, technology exchanges/ trade of military systems to counter the “three evils of separatism, terrorism and extremism”) and increased economical cooperation, which in China’s case mainly concerned pipelines and stable energy supplies (Huang 2006:17). Thus, over the last few years several joint exercises have been held, and in order to draw Uzbekistan away from the U.S. orbit,

the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure was established in Uzbekistan in 2004, to coordinate these countries' counter-terrorism efforts (Clarke 2005:14, Huang 2006:18). In 2004-05, the SCO attracted more countries when Mongolia, Pakistan, India and Iran obtained observer status. Hence, the SCO rose in regional prominence and from the perspective of external boundary demarcation, the Chinese authorities have gained tremendous momentum ever since the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991. Their territorial integrity seems not to be exposed to any genuine traditional security threats (state aggression) in 2007. Quite the contrary, diplomatic efforts and demarcation-agreements have been a prevailing trend between China and its adjoining countries.

Textbox 3. Territorial boundary-demarcation agreements involving Xinjiang.

China- Russia (55 km): In 2001, respectively Vladimir Putin and Jiang Zemin signed the “Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation”. In article 4, both sides acknowledged each other’s territorial integrity.³⁸ In 2004, China and Russia issued a joint statement expressing that “the trend of the boundary line between the two countries has been completely determined”.³⁹

China-Kazakhstan (1,700km): In 1998, president Zemin and his Kazakh counterpart Nursultan Nazarbayev signed a border agreement which “finally, thoroughly and irrevocably” settled outstanding frontier disputes (Dillon 2004:147, Shichor 2004:155.).

China-Kyrgyzstan (1,000km): Initially a border agreement was completely settled in 1999, but the Kyrgyz opposition disputed president Askar Akaev’s consent with the PRC. In 2002, the Kyrgyz People’s Assembly finally ratified the border agreement (however with dismay) (Shichor 2004:156).

China-Tajikistan (450km): The border demarcation line was finally settled in 2002 (Shichor 2004:155).

China-India (200km): No final demarcation line has been settled. However, over the last years the two countries have come to terms on both parts’ *modus operandi* in the border area.⁴⁰

China-Pakistan (600km): “In March 1963, the two countries signed a boundary agreement on China's Xinjiang and the adjacent areas whose defence was under the actual control of Pakistan”.⁴¹

China-Afghanistan (92km): Border delimitation agreed in 1963. Tensions increased with the Soviet-sponsored *coup d'état* in 1978, and the Soviet Unions occupation (1979-89). After the Taliban regime fell in 2001, the PRC authorities emphasize “respect for Afghanistan's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity”.⁴²

China-Mongolia (--): No information is available regarding any border demarcation agreement between the two countries. However, several bilateral meetings have been held the last decade and one Chinese official simply noted in 1999; “border conflict does not exist between China and Mongolia” (Shichor 2004:155).

Moving on with the next section, I survey the non-military aspects of the PRC state building campaign, in particular settler colonization and infrastructure-development.

³⁸ PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2001). “Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation”.

³⁹ PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2004). “China and Russia issue a joint statement”.

⁴⁰ PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2003). “China-India: Declarations of principles for relations”.

⁴¹ PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2003). “Bilateral Relations: China-Pakistan”.

⁴² PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2004). “Bilateral Relations: China-Afghanistan”.

4.1.2. The PRC government's endeavours to deepen its inroads on Xinjiang.

With the inception of the PRC in 1949, the authorities aspired to integrate (“lock-in”) Xinjiang more tightly with China proper, through the spheres of force, law, economy and culture. The spatial dimension (Xinjiang’s proximity to Central Asia and the vast distance to Beijing) was especially pronounced, and thereby it was of vital importance for the PRC government to increase its presence all through the region. In this regard, the preceding subchapter accounted for organizations (PLA-Bingtuan) responsible for external boundary demarcation and the maintenance of internal order.

Continuing with this section, I survey other PRC state building strategies which have tended to be intertwined with the increased inroads of PLA-Bingtuan into the region. A key aspect in this regard has been the centre’s all-embracing efforts to “open up” the region. From 1999 and onwards, this has been embodied by the campaign “Open up the West” with **a)** a further expansion of Xinjiang’s communication axes (arterial highways/railways and telecommunication), and **b)** an extensive extraction of Xinjiang’s raw materials (oil, gas, cotton and agricultural products). This in turn has attracted large-scale influxes of regime-loyal Hans, which profoundly strengthens Beijing’s hold on the region (territorial boundary-accentuation).

Going back to the inception of the Bingtuan in 1954, the centre obtained a paramount law enforcement instrument which was entrusted to be a main “absorber” (accommodator) for the migrating Hans. The Bingtuan was assigned to implement a wide range of entrepreneurial tasks, along with an extensive reclamation of Xinjiang’s wastelands. Given the topographically challenging conditions in this vast region, a prerequisite was a sufficient amount of manpower. Hence, the government partly endorsed and partly forced Han settlement in Xinjiang, and with a rapidly increasing Han-constituency, Xinjiang’s demographic composition changed dramatically.

In a 1941-census, the Uyghurs constituted about 80 percent of Xinjiang’s total population of 3.73 million (Toops 2004b:245). At this stage, the Han population stood at a modest five percent, and Sean R. Roberts explains this with the region’s historical reputation as an “uncivilized backwater” (2004:221). Thus, with the communists’ assumption of power, they initiated a policy to change Xinjiang’s demographical blend at the expense of the region’s indigenous people. Christian Tyler asserts that

approximately half a million PLA soldiers and civilians (technicians, engineers, doctors, teachers and tradesmen) were transferred to Xinjiang in the first few years of the PRC (2003:135). At this stage, there was a precarious need for an inflow of “high calibre personnel” according to the Xinjiang White Paper:

Since the founding of New China, considering Xinjiang’s remoteness, backwardness and shortage of high-calibre personnel, the state has assigned, transferred or encouraged over 800,000 intellectuals and professional and technical personnel from inland regions to work in Xinjiang. Large numbers of university graduates, scientists, technicians and highly-trained professionals have been assigned to Xinjiang.⁴³

Moreover, the authorities wanted to import a regime-loyal Han-constituency to counter Uyghur sentiments for independence. Hence, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, governmental campaigns depicted Han settlers’ struggle to cultivate Xinjiang’s wasteland, as an act of national heroism. Allegedly, this image inspired many Hans to start a new life in Xinjiang, and between 1954 and 1961, roughly 1.5 million people migrated to the region (Toops 2004b:256). For the period between 1950 and 1978, Bovingdon notes that about 3 million Hans were “cajoled, induced, or ordered” to take up residence in Xinjiang (2004:23-24).

Besides the strategy to colonize Xinjiang with Hans, the government also viewed the designation of the province into the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 1955, as a policy to quell Uyghur separatist sentiments. The rationale behind the arrangement was not to make the Uyghurs “masters of their own house”, but to keep them within the “Chinese house”. By a shrewd politico-administrative engineering, the PRC authorities parcelled out the territory “bit by bit”, and designated “sub-autonomies” to minor ethnic groups (Bovingdon 2004:14). Hence, they in reality undermined the overall governing capacity of the Uyghurs (view textbox 4).

Textbox 4. Politico-administrative formation: Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

In 1955, Xinjiang became the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), and *de jure* “an ethnic autonomous area with the Uyghur people as its principal body”. Moreover, it was divided into a range of “sub-autonomies” according to Xinjiang White Paper:

Within the territory of the autonomous region, there also exist other areas where other ethnic minorities live in compact communities. There, corresponding ethnic autonomous areas have also been established. Currently, the whole region has 5 autonomous prefectures for 4 ethnic groups — Kazak, Hui, Kirgiz and Mongolian; 6 autonomous counties for 5 ethnic groups — Kazak, Hui, Mongolian, Tajik and Xibe; and 43 ethnic townships.⁴⁴

⁴³ PRC Embassy (2003). “History and development of Xinjiang” (part 10). White Paper.

⁴⁴ PRC Embassy (2003). “History and development of Xinjiang” (part 8). White Paper.

In 1955, the designation of the XUAR seemingly entitled the Uyghurs to be responsible for the region's overall management, and according the Xinjiang White Paper (2003: Part 2):

As the constitution stipulates, the head of an autonomous region, autonomous prefecture or autonomous county shall be a citizen of the ethnic group exercising regional autonomy in the area concerned; and the other members of the people's governments of these regions, prefectures and counties shall include members of the ethnic group exercising regional autonomy as well as members of other ethnic minorities.

However, the influence of Uyghurs have been undermined by **a)** the “Noah’s ark”-principle of sub-autonomous areas and **b)** the central PRC government’s bypass of the local autonomy.

Regarding the division of the region into a number of smaller autonomies, Bovingdon alleges that this was a “stroke of administrative genius”. By parcelling out the territory “bit by bit” to Xinjiang’s 13 different *minzu* i.e. nationalities, the authorities sought to counter-balance the numerically dominant Uyghurs. In a “state building framework” this entailed an alignment between the central government and Xinjiang’s other groups (converging political interests). This arrangement has limited the Uyghurs’ influence, which in turn has made the other ethnic groups more *status quo* oriented (2004:13-16, 28).

Although the government waves the banner of Xinjiang’s autonomy, many scholars assert that the region actually enjoys less legislative autonomy than ordinary PRC provinces. According to Matthew Moneyhon, the current implication of autonomy in the region “means modernization, sinification, and ultimately, integration into the Han framework” (2002:152).⁴⁵ Bovingdon argues that the Hans colonize Xinjiang’s governmental institutions at all levels, and that the indigenous cadres in reality act as a useful device to implement unpopular policies (instruments in the PRC’s “puppet show”) (2004:4).

Returning to the influx of Hans, the region has also undergone years with a net outflow (the “peacock flying to the south-east”). Viewed through the lens of Rokkan’s centre-periphery paradigm, the PRC’s “locking-in” (order) mechanisms were thus the potentially suffering party, at the income of conflicting Uyghur separatist tendencies (movement). In the post-1978 period, several overt “voice-disturbances” occurred among Hans, who sought to return to China proper. These youths had been deployed from urban centres during the Cultural Revolution, and now found that their residence permits only applied for Xinjiang. Hence, the authorities in China proper refused to

⁴⁵ Moneyhon employs the following five principles by Hannum and Lillich to scrutinize whether Xinjiang has an autonomous arrangement; **1)** Independent legislature **2)** Locally chosen chief executive **3)** Independent judiciary, **4)** Status of autonomy consistent with powers granted, **5)** Autonomy and self-government are consistent with power-sharing arrangements. In a brief, Moneyhon concludes that an “application of these five principles demonstrates that Xinjiang’s autonomy does not satisfy even the minimum standard” (2002:142).

accommodate returning Hans with residence and jobs. In order to reach a *modus vivendi* with the indignant youths, the PRC called in Wang Zhen and Wang Enmao (once again Xinjiang's First Party Secretary), but they failed to forestall a net outflow of Hans in the 1980s. The tide nonetheless turned in 1990, when a new wave of Han immigrants now settled in Xinjiang by choice (the "peacock flying west"). At this stage the region appeared to be an attractive destination for Hans seeking to improve their socio-economic status. This trend has accelerated further as the region entered the new millennium and was exposed to PRC campaign "Open up the West" (Bovingdon 2004:24-25, Becquelin 2004, Toops 2004a, Goodman 2004:327). The synopsis below illustrates the profound numerical increase of Hans.⁴⁶

Table 4. Population in Xinjiang, 1953-2004.⁴⁷

Ethnic groups	1953	1964	1982	1990	2000	2004
Uyghur	3,640,000	4,021,200	5,995,000	7,195,000	8,345,622 (45,2%)	8,976,700 (45,7%)
Han	299,000	2,445,400	5,284,000	5,696,000	7,489,919 (40,6%)	7,802,500 (39,7%)
Kazakh	492,000	501,400	903,000	1,106,000	1,245,023 (6,7%)	1,381,600 (7,0%)
Hui	150,000	271,100	567,000	682,000	839,837 (4,6%)	876,300 (4,5%)
Kyrgyz	68,000	69,200	112,000	140,000	158,775 (0,9%)	171,200 (0,87%)
Others	225,000	133,500	220,500	337,900	230,743 (1,25%)	422,800 (2,15%)
Total	4,874,000	7,441,800	13,081,500	15,156,900	18,459,511	19,631,100

According to Tyler, the 2000 census did not include one million members of the armed forces (soldiers and police) and 2.5 million Han Chinese, closely affiliated with the Bingtuan. Consequently, given Tyler's (somehow imprecise) estimation⁴⁸, Hans constitute by far the largest ethnic group, as about 12 million reside in Xinjiang (2003:214). Toops also underscores the point that the Hans outnumber the Uyghurs. In particular, he emphasizes the "floating population" (unofficial migrants in search of labour), which might add up to 2.8 million Hans. Combining this number with approximately 100,000 unregistered PLA troops, Hans add up to roughly 10 million

⁴⁶ Stanley W. Toops considers the 1982, 1990, and 2000 census to be "accurate", the 1953 census "adequate", while the remaining census from 1962 is characterized as "poor" (2004b:245):

⁴⁷ The data between 1953 and 1990 are accessible from Toops (2004b: 246), the 2000 census is made available by Toops (2004a), while the 2004 census is accessible in Xinjiang Yearbook 2005 (2005:103).

⁴⁸ Shichor's estimations on the PLA would to some extent undermine Tyler's calculation. Moreover, a minor negligence is that Han Chinese does not constitute 100 percent of the personnel in the Bingtuan, more precisely about 92 percent.

(2004b:249). But who are these Hans? One plausible answer is Dillon's taxonomy of five groups (I added the "floating Han-population" as a sixth category) (2004:75):

1. Descendants of the early settlers.
2. Guomindang troops and their descendants (many absorbed into the Bingtuan).
3. Personnel who have been assigned to key government jobs.
4. The transfer of young Chinese during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76).
5. Prisoners from the labour reform and released prisoners who have found a job.
6. The "floating Hans" who drift around in Xinjiang in search of labour.

A key factor in analysing Xinjiang's demographic composition is the rate of natural increase among the ethnic groups. While there has been a steady natural increase of Uyghurs, the dramatic increase of Hans is mainly due to in-migration. In 1988, Muslims in Xinjiang were subjected to the national family planning policies, where the quotas became two babies for urban couples and three for the peasants. Han immigrants were permitted two children per family. This policy is resented by Uyghurs and viewed by many as an affront to God (Tyler 2003:159). Furthermore, Uyghurs argue that fertility decisions fall under the purview of their autonomous rights, and that the underlying reason for Xinjiang's population problems is the accommodative state-policy toward migrating Hans (Bovingdon 2004:26).

The long-standing Han residents in Xinjiang ("*lao Xinjiang ren*") also resent the latter policy, along with objecting to the authorities' accommodative policies toward the new migrants, who settle deeper into the "Uyghur heartland" southwards. These "*lao Hans*" have like the Uyghurs, endured a harsh self-sacrificing life as tillers of the soil, and thus, a *modus vivendi* has progressed. They fear that the authorities' accommodative policies toward the new Han settlers and general discrimination ("Han chauvinism"), may jeopardize this relationship (Becquelin 2000:85).

Open up the West: Exposing Uyghur "heartland" to an increased influx of Hans.

The PRC government's state building efforts in Xinjiang, have since 1999 focused on the campaign "Open up the West" (Gladney 2004a:101). To get a further hold on the region, the Chinese authorities have endeavoured to upgrade Xinjiang's communication networks and more comprehensively exploit the region's untapped resources (mainly oil and gas). While this would provide the hinterland's booming industries with energy supplies, these policies were also initiated to allure more Hans

to settle in the region. Hence, from a centre-periphery perspective, this addressed the spatial dimension (accentuating the PRC's physical supremacy in the region), as well as to serve the centre, whose "machinery" is increasingly in need of raw materials.

The campaign has particularly been embodied by a key project to build a 4,200-kilometer pipeline for natural gas to a terminus at Shanghai (Wiemer 2004: 173). According to the Chinese scholar Huang Jun, the authorities aspire to produce 30 billion cubic metres of natural gas annually by 2010, with only a third remaining in Xinjiang. Moreover, they aim to reach "a total crude oil output of 30 million tons by 2010" (2005:297). With an estimated reserve of 21 billion tons of oil, 10 trillion cubic metre of natural gas (respectively 30/34 percent of national onshore totals), and an expected 40 percent of China's coal reserves, Xinjiang is evidently an invaluable reservoir for the regime (Ma 2005:3). However, these are only conservative estimates, and further explorations remain to be conducted in the vast Tarim Basin.⁴⁹



Photo Truls Winje: From my journey to a Uyghur village in outskirts of Turpan, where numerous oil exploiting devices are installed.

Although the local authorities receive tax payments from these operations and support for infrastructure developments, Calla Wiemer nevertheless argue that the central government is the main beneficiary, rather than the region itself (2004:174). This generates grievance and an interesting allegory among Uyghurs goes like this: As trains from China proper arrive in Xinjiang, they steam "*chi, chi, chi* (eat, eat, eat)". Returning to China proper with Xinjiang's riches, the following sound appears; "*chibaole, chibaole, chibaole* (I'm full, full, full)" (Tyler 2003:214).

⁴⁹ As I travelled southwards from Korla to Khotan, numerous gas fields illuminated the dark Taklimakan Desert night.

Along with the extensive resource exploitation, the campaign “Open up the West” has as previously mentioned, also aspired to penetrate deeper in the region by upgrading its communication networks. With the construction of far-flung transportation-routes, Xinjiang’s northern and southern parts have been linked more thoroughly together, and Han Chinese settlers have followed along. The completion of Taklimakan Highway (through the desert) in 1995 and the extension of the southern Xinjiang railway to Kashgar in 1999, were especially “breakthrough events”. This in turn facilitated an increased Han migration into the rural south, where fewer than 10 percent of the inhabitants were Hans in 2000. Prior to these achievements, the north and in particular the provincial capital Urümqi, had historically been more exposed to this migration (Becquelin 2000:68, Bovingdon 2004:25, Toops 2004a:25). Below is a synopsis of paramount “penetrating” landmarks in this regard:

Textbox 5. Landmarks in the PRC construction of communication axis.

Xinjiang’s railway system.

1958: Railroad lines were extended to Hami in eastern Xinjiang from China proper.

1962: The Lanzhou-Xinjiang Railway reached Urümqi.

1984: Southern Xinjiang Railway opened from Turpan to Korla.

1992: China extended its rail line to Kazakhstan.

1994: The Lanzhou-Xinjiang Railway was double-tracked.

1999: Southern Xinjiang Railway was extended from Korla to Kashgar.

2001: Operating railway lines totalled 3,010. km.

In 2005, the Chinese scholar Huang Jun estimated that in about ten years’ time, a railway link between Jinghe and Ili will have been completed, while a project to link Kuytun and Altay will have been initiated (2005:295). Consequently, more Hans will presumably settle in these areas as well.

Xinjiang’s highway system.

1949: Allegedly “crudely built highways”, totalling 3,360 km.

1995: The completion of Taklimakan Highway, linking north and south across the desert.

2001: 80,900 km highway network with the provincial capital Urümqi as the centre (Beijing’s “bridgehead” into Xinjiang), and linked to all the corners of the region.

Xinjiang’s Aviation.

The region has 11 airports for domestic and/or international flights.

General sources: Xinjiang White Paper, Stanley W. Toops (2004b:258) and Nicolas Becquelin (2000:74).

My journey to Xinjiang in 2007, revealed that the area to the north of the Tarim Basin (I visited Urumqi, Turpan and Korla), was much more marked by the presence of Han Chinese, than in the southern part (Khotan, Kashgar, and numerous villages between these cities). However, particularly in Kashgar, I encountered numerous “Chinese-style” buildings, parks and streets, along with a substantial amount of Hans. Although the city accommodates an “old-city” (orbiting the famous Id Gah Mosque) with about 10,000 Uyghurs at the city hub, this is primarily a tourist curiosity. A stroll around in the city revealed the supremacy of the PRC government, and Chinese street names, statues, flags and wall paintings made sure to “remind the Uyghurs”, that Beijing is indisputably the monocephalic centre they do orbit. Even though this was not that pronounced in Khotan (also fewer Han Chinese), this depiction still applies here as well. Below are some illustrating pictures that I took downtown in Kashgar:



Photo Truls Winje: From a schoolyard in the Uyghur “old-city” in Kashgar, showcasing Uyghur pupils’ allegiance to the “Motherland” (the building symbolizes Tiananmen Square in Beijing).



Photo Truls Winje: This 24-metre high statue of Chairman Mao is situated in the centre of Kashgar, at the People’s Square.

From the Chinese authorities’ point of view, its recent policies have further strengthened their physical hold on Xinjiang. However, the current presence of PRC agencies and regime-loyal Hans southwards is not considered to be adequate. Traditionally, most of the violent Uyghur “voice-incidents” have taken place in this area, and in order to root out what Li Sheng labels “splittist undercurrents left over from Old China”, the government aspires to increase its presence here (2005:258).

Recollecting Ma Dazheng's depiction of Bingtuan's strategies as "two circles and one line" (the circles illustrated the Corp's presence around the Gurbantunggut Desert to the north and the Taklimakan Desert to the south, while the line represented the PRC frontier to the Soviet), the southern "circle" is simply incomplete (2005:256). Thus, Ma in another publication has actually called for an encirclement of the Uyghurs, by "filling in blank spaces" with regime-loyal Hans. This was particularly pronounced for Khotan, as an expansion of Bingtuan's activity in the area "will prove an excellent conduit for changing the *minzu* population ratio in Hotan, which has gotten out of balance" (Bovingdon 2004:27-28).

Further, Fuller and Starr have addressed the possible future scenario of a PRC "Bantustan policy towards the Uyghurs" in the south. This entails a state where the Uyghurs are confined to exert local autonomous rule in a few core oasis-areas, "while remaining islands in a sea of Han-controlled territory" (2004:68). In the long run, this may actually become the unpleasant reality for the Uyghurs, especially if Ma's line of reasoning gains momentum among the governing Han-elite. Anyways, the PRC government's *modus operandi* in 2007 also indisputably facilitates an increased influx of Hans. Nicolas Becquelin asserts that the "sinicization" policy (settler colonization and homogenization of the Chinese nation) towards Xinjiang was by and large covert until 1999, when the authorities initiated the campaign "Open up the West". However, currently these policies are allegedly "directly acknowledged" as a solution to the "nationality problem", in the borderland area of Xinjiang (2004:359, 368).

Consequently, the Chinese authorities have for instance allured many Hans with beneficial terms for land cultivation at remote farms areas, where the Uyghurs have traditionally been numerically dominant. Although pressure on the arable land southwards is already unsustainable due to scarce water resources, and the large scale cultivation of cotton, the authorities have nonetheless accommodated Han settlement (Becquelin 2000:76). Moreover, Toops alleges that the PRC modernization drive throughout Xinjiang, greatly jeopardizes the region's vulnerable ecological system. If this course is not dramatically altered, he predicts a large-scale environmental crisis (2004b:275). This in turn fuels the conflict between Uyghur and Han communities, which is further reinforced by growing wealth disparities (advantageous for Hans),

clashes in lifestyles (“Han chauvinism”), policies of acculturation (“sinicization”) toward the Uyghurs, and importantly, the tough competition for jobs and positions.

Regarding the latter aspect, Fuller and Starr depict a state where prestigious positions in the official and private sector, by and large are monopolized by Han Chinese. Consequently, the employment patterns reflect a “glass ceiling”, which in reality excludes Uyghurs from the top jobs (social stigmata). The corporations and work units (mainly headed by Han leaders), prefer Hans when they employ and expand their business. This is evidently reflected by the employment patterns, where Hans fill about four fifth of all jobs in manufacturing, oil and gas industries, science and technology, transport, and nine-tenths in the sector of construction. Moreover, the rate of unemployed and underemployed Uyghurs, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz is distinctly imbalanced, and hence, a formula for ethnical tension (2004:17-19).⁵⁰

A central aspect which potentially reinforces the “glass ceiling”-phenomenon is *gunaxi* practice, where social relations/networks are utilized in order to covertly accomplish tasks/ desired outcomes for family and friends (a “backdoor” system). This obviously conflicts with the rational-legal system and has a “flavour of” corruption. However, this practice has strong historical roots in ancient China and according to Torstein Hjellum, it increased significantly during “Dengism” (Deng Xiaoping’s initiated reform policies from 1978 and onwards) (2000, 2007:38, 76-7). Thus, one may assume that this applies for Xinjiang as well, and of particular interest are the lucrative exploitation of oil and gas, licence handling, and the process of foreign investments, which are largely run by the Hans. With the increased influx of Hans, the *guanxi* practice may increase and further marginalize the indigenous people.

Consequently, many Uyghurs perceive the campaign “Open up the West” as a PRC version of “the Trojan Horse—the pretext of economic assistance may cover the Han forces of assimilation” (Moneyhon 2002:148). An inherent rationale behind the campaign (besides state building), has been to arouse pro-regime sentiments (nation-building) by increasing the Uyghurs’ prosperity. However, as Hans are the *de facto* main beneficiary, the PRC authorities have only gained further spatial ground, whereas endeavours to conquer Uyghurs’ hearts and minds seem to have been in vain.

⁵⁰ During my journey in Xinjiang, I observed numerous workers affiliated with the state/local government. Indisputably, the Hans were numerically dominant compared to other ethnic groups. Surprisingly, I observed the same pattern in the south and especially in Kashgar.

4.2. Nation-building: Standardizations and restrictions on Uyghur distinctiveness.

Surveying the reach and scope of the PRC's nation-building policies toward the Uyghurs (weaken and redraw primordial boundaries to broaden the scope of a national Chinese identity), warrant a comprehensive analysis of various traits of Uyghur distinctiveness. Formulated into a Hirshmanian-Rokkanian jargon, the following subchapters survey the PRC's employed "boundary-penetrating technologies" to institutionalize and control the "House of Islam" in Xinjiang, establishing Mandarin as the *lingua franca* among Uyghurs, and to ensure the production of "appropriate" (not regime dissenting) narrative arts from the Uyghurs. Furthermore, it addresses Uyghur boundary-maintaining counter-forces for the preservation of their distinctive markers.

In order to assess the PRC government's potential to weaken an overall Uyghur identity, it seem to offer much of relevance to address the following question in more detail; who are the Uyghurs? In this regard, a plausible starting point may be to examine junctures of historical relevance for the current state of Uyghur identity and potential courses of development. Thus, the section, "Uyghur Identity: Diversity the eldest daughter of distance?" introduce this subchapter (4.2.).

4.2.1. Uyghur Identity: Diversity the eldest daughter of distance?

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed account of the link between Xinjiang's oasis-dwelling Uyghurs, and various historical groups referred to as "Uyghurs", a brief account nevertheless seems plausible. The origin of the Uyghurs is normally traced back to the Uyghur Empire (745-840), which was situated in central Mongolia and extended into northwestern China. This empire of nomadic traits had a shamanistic orientation, whereas the "succeeding" Uyghurs (844-932) were a blend of different orientations, and permanently settled in Turpan (eastern Xinjiang). During the period of 932-1450, an elitist Turkic society oriented towards Buddhism emerged, and it was known as "Uyghuristan". Their Buddhist cultivation functioned as a clear demarcation to the Turkic Muslims, who resided in western parts of Xinjiang. However, in the 15th century, the label "Uyghur" allegedly fell into disuse for the next 500 years, as the Uyghurs converted to Islam (Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004:302, Millward and Perdue 2004:40-50).

In the 1930s, warlord Sheng Shicai as the first in the official discourse, started to refer to the Turkic Muslim oasis dwellers as Uyghurs. Sheng, closely affiliated with the Soviet Union at this time, was probably introduced to the term ‘Uyghur’ by his Soviet advisors (Tyler 2003:117). Allegedly this label was motivated by the notion that “such an identity had so many cracks and fissures that the newly self-defined Uyghurs would be easy to control” (Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004:302). By and large, the PRC government adopted Sheng’s designations, with its distinctions between the numerical dominant Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Tungans (Huis) and Han Chinese. One rationale behind this line of continuation was their ambition to play Uyghurs and Kazaks against one another, in order to avoid the strengthening of pan-Turkic forces (Rudelson 1997:35). Moreover to generate loyalty, as emphasized by Gladney;

The original creation of national groups was a strategic temporary recognition of ethnic difference in order to solicit support in the revolutionary process, it later led to the hardening of ethnic boundaries—the creation of identities, which were supposed to be only provisional (1991:93 in Petersen 2006:65).

The establishment of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region on October 1, 1955, was also motivated by aspirations to win over the trust and loyalty of the Uyghurs. This event nurtured both a region-wide Uyghur identity, as well as fuelling aspirations for their *de jure* autonomy to become a genuine one (Starr 2004:6). In hindsight, this policy was diametric to the creation of provisional identities, as Turkic oasis dwellers embraced the notion of “Uyghurness”. Related to this, Gladney observes that Uyghur nationalist now assert lineage kinship with the first Uyghur empire (745-840). However, concerning the perception that all dwellers in Xinjiang descend from the same nationality, he simply notes that this is an invention that stems from the “twentieth-century nationalism” (2004a:103). Rudelson and Jankowiak continue further along this path, and while they admit that the Uyghur identity has gained tremendous ground during the last fifty years, this has nevertheless been an artificial political construct, created by top-down administrative statutory instruments. Thus, they argue that family, clan and the oasis take precedence over an overall Uyghur identity, which is fairly easy to control (2004:303, 315). The remaining part of this subchapter surveys alleged cracks and subdivisions among the Uyghurs, and moreover incorporates academic contributions which challenge the notions above.

In chapter 1, Xinjiang was briefly accounted for as an utterly complex cultural zone, exposed to centrifugal forces pulling the region in different directions. In Justin Jon Rudelson's groundbreaking "Oasis identities: Uyghur nationalism along China's Silk Road", it is argued that the vast distances previously isolated the oases and its population from one another. These geographical conditions rather cultivated cross-border interactions and thus exposed Xinjiang territory and its people, to the influences of different bordering cultures. Hence, Kashgar has been strongly influenced by Islamic traditions westwards (Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Ferghana Valley), the northern Xinjiang has been affected by Russia (the Soviet Union) and Central Asian influences, Khotan has nurtured close connections with northern parts of India, while Turpan in the eastern part of Xinjiang, has been more exposed to the Han Chinese culture, due to its proximity with China hinterland (1997:17, 39-40).

The geographical legacy of Xinjiang; oases isolated from one another, has thus generated an inward focus of the various oasis communities, with its own economic and social dynamics, "self-governing on a day-to-day basis" (Starr 2004:12). Allegedly this fostered local identities at the expense of an overall Uyghur identity, and Rudelson finds the words of Fernand Braudel especially illuminating; "diversity is the eldest daughter of distance" (1997:24). Supposedly the Uyghur identity "glossed over a host of internal differences present in the Uyghur oases that many Uyghurs refuse to recognise", and these traits of diversity still functions as a major impediment for Uyghur nationalists' program (Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004:303). Gladney reasons along similar lines as he observes divisions among Uyghurs by religious factions, territorial loyalties, linguistic varieties and political sympathies (2004a:110).

In this regard, Rudelson finds it opportune to refer to the work of the Uyghur folklorist Nizamdin Yusuyun, who asserts that it exists seven divisions among the present day's Uyghurs. In their quest for a glorious primordial Uyghur unity, Rudelson claims that Uyghur intellectuals often fail to acknowledge these subdivisions, as they indulge "in a mythic past" (1997:24,169). In my interviews with Uyghur expatriate leaders in Bishkek and Almaty, I presented Yusuyun's classifications beneath and it was categorically denounced as it only illustrated geographical distance, and not in any way, significant divisions among the Uyghurs.

1. **Dolans**; living in Merkit nearby Kashgar and viewed by many Uyghurs as primitive and poor, due to their social custom of walking barefoot.
 2. **Lopliks**; a fishing community nearby Lap Nor (ex-nuclear weapons testing range).
 3. **Abdals**; a travelling/peripatetic group residing in the south of Xinjiang.
 4. **Keriyalik**s; situated east of Khotan in the southern rim of Taklimakan Dessert.
- These have been especially influenced by the northern Indian culture.
5. **Kashgarliks**; living in the Kashgar area and profoundly influenced by Islam, due to the proximity of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Ferghana Valley in Central Asia.
 6. **Eastern Uyghurs**; situated in Turpan and Hami, the historical centre of a previous Uyghur empire dated back to the eight and ninth centuries C.E. Due to its proximity with China proper, Chinese influences have been more profound.
 7. **Kuldjaliks** or **Taranchi**; situated in Ili and not considered as Uyghurs prior to 1949.

At the core of Rudelson and Jankowiak's argumentation is then that Xinjiang's geography (distance) generates a poorly organized and fragmented set of Uyghur responses to the Chinese presence in Xinjiang. While Xinjiang's geographical conditions and its dynamics also challenge China's aspirations for the region, it nevertheless more profoundly hamper the project of Uyghur nation-builders. Time allegedly works in favour of the Chinese government and "Uyghurs face the possibility of their own people being splintered and atomized in the immediate future" (2004:303-304). The renewed cross-border contacts with people situated in the independent Central-Asian states from 1990 and onwards, seem to reinforce these dynamics. However, other observers rapport on the contrary effect (2004:313).

In the thesis "Rebirth of a nation", David Brophy vigorously attempts to counter some of Rudelson and Jankowiak's most central hypothesis. As a starting point, it is argued that their contributions have an inclination of "reading the past into the present". Regardless of the undeniable past with identities in flux, they erroneously employ an inherent scepticism towards the homogeneity of a current Uyghur identity (2005:11-12). Moreover, he asserts that identity is not necessarily a finite space where you either identify as a Kashgarilik/Turpanlik or as a Uyghur. Quite the contrary, multiple sets of self identifications may co-exist. In this regard, Brophy observes a strong Uyghur identity, "as coherent as any national identity can ever be, which co-

exists with various other forms of attachment, including to one's oasis of origin".⁵¹ In order to comprehend the dynamics behind this strong Uyghur identity, he advocates a perspective which incorporates both top-down administrative processes as well as the popular forces working from below (2005:14, 18, 21).

Consequently, he then attempts to counter the perception that nations and national identities are solely an elitist construct à la Benedict Anderson's "Imagined community" and Charles Tilly's "Nations of design" (Brophy 2005:6-8). The national Uyghur identity has also been nurtured from below (by the Uyghur masses), and is not as viewed by Eric Hobsbawm, only resulted by elites who dash various ingredients (history, symbols, myths and languages) of often diverse origin, into an English "ploughman's lunch", as Anthony D. Smith puts it (1995:4-5). Allegedly this provides an explanation for the rise and strength of Uyghur national sentiments (as a part of a general wave of national sentiments around the world). This in general contradicts Hobsbawm's predictions for a large scale demise of nationalism (Brophy 2005: 6-8).

Furthermore, Brophy seemingly identifies another "major logical flaw" in Rudelson and Jankowiak's contribution, as they assert that the current Uyghur identity "glossed over a whole host of internal differences", while applying an unproblematic notion of the homogeneity of local oases identities. Brophy stresses that the oasis identity of "Hotan" also glosses over internal social differences among its dwellers, and allegedly their contribution does not acknowledge these oases' intra-divisions. While this point in general is well taken, the criticism toward Rudelson is somehow misplaced. In Rudelson's seminal study of Turpan's internal dynamics, he revealed distinct divisions of orientation between the oasis' intellectuals, farmers and merchants. Middle income and poor peasants tend to have a strong Islamic identification, which also fosters a strong "Turpanlik" oasis identity. Turpan merchants on the other hand have stronger feelings of belonging to the Chinese state, as beneficiaries of close economical interaction with China proper. Finally, Turpan intellectuals aspire to promote an overall and unifying Uyghur nationalist ideology. Allegedly, these intellectuals rarely transcend their Turpan "oases identity, which they tend rather to

⁵¹ Herbert S. Yee's survey of ethnic consciousness and identity among the Uyghurs seems to support Brophy's notion. Regardless of some drawbacks with his sampling and question design, he nevertheless asserts that the Uyghurs manifest both a strong ethnic identity as well as local identity (2005:50). The Hui Chinese scholar Yang Shengmin conducted a survey among Uyghurs in 2004, and also he revealed a strong Uyghur identity, although his numbers indicated even "stronger sentiments" for their Chinese identity (2006:10-13).

project broadly as Uyghur” (1997:8-9). Beyond these paramount findings of diversity, Rudelson, arguably in an inadequate way, pursues this insight for the remaining part of the book. Thus, he unintentionally becomes somehow more exposed to Brophy’s criticism, which concerned the handling of oases as “natural sizes”.

The following subchapters survey several cultural markers which seem to be closely affiliated with the notion of “Uyghurness”. It is my assumption that these markers foster Uyghur identity-building/non-spatial boundary-building towards the “other”, which is mainly embodied by the Han Chinese authorities and their policies. Especially at times of restrictive PRC policies toward these distinctive markers along with a notion of general group-stigmata, it may be expected that intergroup behaviour prevails among the Uyghurs, at the expense of interpersonal behaviour.⁵²

4.2.2. The “House of Islam” and its organization in Xinjiang.

Islam first arrived in Kashgar from Central Asia by the tenth century C.E., and the city became a religious centre in the south of Xinjiang. However, it was not until the mid-fifteenth century, that nearly all the Turkic-speaking people in Xinjiang converted from Buddhism to the Hanafi jurisprudence, which is the most liberal of the four law branches in the world of Sunni Islam. This paramount juncture deepened the cultural differences between the Chinese and the Turkic world (Fuller and Lipman 2004:326-8). Over the five succeeding centuries, the southern parts of Xinjiang were especially exposed to the influence and rule of several Islamic formations (khanates), based outside (in Ferghana Valley) as well as within the territory of Xinjiang. The era of Yaqub Beg and the short-lived (1933) Turkic Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkistan (in Kashgar and Khotan), were among the most significant events.

The reminiscence of these regimes’ rise, *modus operandi* and eventually fall, influences on how many Uyghurs currently perceive other ethnic groups, the legitimacy of the PRC and their desired end-states for the territory. This section now proceeds by surveying the PRC’s policies between 1949 and 2007, to institutionalize and control Islam in Xinjiang. Moreover, it provides an account for how the Uyghur counter-cultures have covertly attempted to omit a variety of these restrictions.

⁵² This distinction by Tajfel and Turner was accounted for in subchapter 3.3.

In 1949, the PLA successfully penetrated the territory of Xinjiang and what followed for its indigenous people, was a comprehensive incorporation into the PRC jurisdiction. Initially, a policy of modest governmental supervision prevailed towards the practice of Islam. However, the authorities soon embarked on an all-embracing process to institutionalize Islam. As a starting point in early 1950s, the authorities confiscated the mosques' valuable properties and arable land. This policy of land reform was not solely initiated to undermine the influences of the Islamic clerics, as it more widely targeted all major land owners. The Chinese scholar Li Xiaoxia justifies this policy as it repealed the "religious feudalist privileges and oppressive and exploitative system" (2005:194). The "House of Islam" was further weakened with the elimination of Islamic taxes. Gradually, Islamic courts and judge systems became abolished, and such matters as debts, pledges, divorce, the criminal law and the handling of other disputes, came under the jurisdiction of the PRC courts (Rudelson 1997: 45, Dillon 2004: 29-30, Fuller and Lipman 2004).

Another PRC strategy was to incorporate clerics institutionally and put them on the payroll of the Beijing-based Chinese Islamic Association (CIA). This official association provided the curriculum for the only officially sanctioned madrassah (religious school) in Xinjiang. An implication of this was (and currently is) that explanations of Islam, both written and publicly spoken, falls under state control. Furthermore, CIA has an exclusive right to educate the officially practicing clerics, and their curriculum also involves indoctrination in the tenets of socialism. The White Paper of Xinjiang (2003) justified this to ensure an "appropriate religious conduct":

In order to ensure the normal operation of religious activities, Xinjiang has established an Islamic college specializing in training senior clergymen. Islamic bodies in prefectures and prefectural-level cities, have opened Islamic classes to train clergymen in accordance with actual needs (my underlining).⁵³

Already by the regime's first decade in operation, the Chinese authorities had thus managed to substantially weaken the position of Islam. Through a Rokkanian conceptual lens, the centre's politico-administrative penetration of official Islam, was rendered possible by their brute power (the PLA and the Bingtuan embodied these state building capabilities). Islamic counter-cultures could not challenge these new

⁵³ PRC Embassy (2003). "History and development of Xinjiang" (part 9). White Paper.

restrictions overtly⁵⁴, and the foregoing Great Leap Forward (1959-1961) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) left “the House of Islam” even worse off.

The Cultural Revolution attacked “feudal oppression”, and Islam was allegedly one of the markers which represented the “four olds” (old custom, old culture, old habits, and old ideas). In this tense atmosphere, Mao’s Red Guardists brutally attacked Islam and Central Asian customs in general. Religious texts like the Qur’an, Islamic sites/mosques and other Islamic symbols were either burned/destroyed or sanctioned (closed, prohibited). There exist numerous accounts of Mullahs and other religious incumbents being tortured and paraded in the streets, while cadavers of pigs functioned as pennants in mosques (Tyler 2003:156, Millward and Tursun 2004:97). This is also acknowledged by the current Chinese regime and its scholars, as “the policy of freedom of religious belief was seriously undermined” (Li 2005:196).

From the “wreckage” of the devastating Culture Revolution, Deng Xiaoping rose to replace the departed Mao (1976) in 1978. He initiated policies of controlled tolerance of ethnic minorities and their religious institutions. This was mainly initiated to undermine nationalistic resistance movements, which had gained momentum during the last decades, and further to recapture some trust among the indigenous people. In this new atmosphere, a large number of mosques were built and the authorities showed more sensitivity towards Muslim food-requirements and religious holidays. Uyghur communist leaders were even sent on the Hajj to Mecca, in order to increase their social prestige in the Uyghur society (Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004:308).

Moreover, during the late 1980s, the borders of Pakistan opened up and Pakistani tradesmen and clerics played a crucial role in bringing ideas and information about Islam. They also brought “Muslim merchandize”, like the Qur’an and veils. Xinjiang Muslims were allowed to visit Pakistan and at their return, they brought with them impressions and experiences imprinted in Islamic piety. This combined with the education of Uyghur mullahs and imams at Pakistani madrassahs, were instrumental in introducing new and stricter interpretations of Islam. Especially southern parts of Xinjiang became affected by these religious sentiments and many women started to

⁵⁴ The only religious tradition that the authorities have found hard to monitor and sanction is the traditions of Sufism, which is put into practice outside the mosques. Sufism is considered to be “Islam’s mystical arm” and is popular among Central Asian people, as it comprises ritual dances, music, and chanted remembrances of God. The strict Saudi Arabian Wahhabism strongly denounces this path.

wear veils.⁵⁵ At this stage, Islam also revealed its potential as a force to question the legitimacy of the Chinese authorities. Hence, religious exchanges with Pakistan soon came to an end (Roberts 2004:226-227, Fuller and Lipman 2004: 330).

What followed in the 1990s, was the eruption of violent Uyghur resistance (overt “voice” in a Hirschmanian jargon), which Millward in section 4.1.1. referred to as “three clusters of events”. This resistance varied from demonstrations, to riots and even detonations of bombs at various sites in Xinjiang and Beijing. These incidents profoundly affected the PRC’s policies toward Islam (as well as Uyghurs in their daily life). Starr notes that the government quickly labelled this “voice activities” as “illegal religious activities”. To counter these tendencies, the authorities embarked on a line of “hard policies”, embodied by the “Strike hard, maximum pressure”-campaigns (Starr 2004:15). According to Fuller and Lipman, means to counter the “illegal religious activities” in Xinjiang simply meant to neutralize aspects of Islam, which the authorities could not sufficiently control (2004:324). In the White Paper “Freedom of religious beliefs in China” from 1997, the authorities stated:

In China [...] all religions must safeguard the people’s interests, the sanctity of the law, ethnic unity and unification of the nation [...]. Since the 1980s some pernicious organizations have sprung up in certain areas of China, which engage in illegal and even criminal activities under the signboard of religion.⁵⁶

This document stressed the need to “falsify” separatism and “splittism”, allegedly veiled in religious banners and slogans. Moreover, it emphasized the authorities’ considerate and sensitive policies toward “normal” religious practices:

Article 36 of the Constitution stipulates, Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief [...] no state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The State protects normal religious activities, and no one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the State. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.⁵⁷

Peter Lom’s recent documentary “On a tightrope”, illuminated how the authorities utilize the educational system to indoctrinate among the youngsters, the

⁵⁵ In my journey to Kashgar and Khotan, I encountered a higher rate of women with veils compared to that of Urumqi, Turpan and Korla. I observed three main “ways of veiling”: 1. A veiling solely of the women’s hair. 2. Veiling of hair and throat. 3. A complete veiling except of the women’s eyes. Although the first alternative was numerically most pronounced, alternative 3 (almost absent in the north), was also manifested, and significantly more among Uyghur women in Kashgar than in Khotan.

⁵⁶ PRC Embassy (1997). “Legal Protection of the Freedom of Religious Belief” (part 2). White Paper.

⁵⁷ Opt. Cit.

need to denounce “illegal religious activities” (mosque attendance or religious study by any children under eighteen), along with glorifying the tenets of socialism. In brief, Lom followed some Uyghur orphanages who aspired to become tightrope walkers and by chance, he one day got an opportunity to film during an outdoor school-session. Here they stated the following illustrative student oath, while raising their clenched fist:

We will continue our ancestors’ communism.
We will become stronger by following Marx.
We will fight those who oppose our country, our national unity and our culture.
We will respect science. We will not take part in any religious activities.
We strongly oppose national separatism.
We will study hard for China’s prosperity. We progress each day.⁵⁸

The incidents on September 11, 2001 had a profound effect on Islam around the globe, and evidently impacted on the PRC’s operations in Xinjiang as well. At this stage, the official Chinese discourse went from characterizing Uyghur nationalists as “separatists”, to equate them with international Islamic terrorists (Dwyer 2005: X). The Chinese authorities’ “hard policies” gained momentum in this aftermath, which were particularly directed at underground religious rites and instructions. Moreover, it greatly restricted the religious latitude for the publicly employed clerics, and the authorities now have an absolute definition power in; educating and approving the religious figures, defining a cleric’s latitude of expression, selecting “appropriate” Islamic literature (officially sanctioned) versus smuggled non-approved Islamic literature of foreign origin. Fuller and Lipman also report of spill-over effects into the public labour market, where customs of dressing/ appearance are strictly sanctioned. Chinese Communist Party members are excluded from religious instructions/ prayers, and violations seem to lay waste on their prospects for upward social mobility (2004: 324-5, 339, Tyler 2003:156).⁵⁹ Dillon also refers to reports which allege that Uyghur Muslims have been denied fasting during Ramadan (2004:157).

The brief segment above, arguably illustrates the comprehensive sanctions of Islam and its Uyghur followers in Xinjiang. Moneyhon argues that these policies of control are far stricter, compared to the practice of Islam among other people in China (2002:13). What is particularly frustrating for the Uyghur followers of Islam, seems to

⁵⁸ Lom, Petr (2007). *On a tightrope*. (About 22-23 minutes into the documentary, one may find this student oath).

⁵⁹ The Human Right Watch report “Devastating Blows: Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang” provides numerous accounts of surveillance, forced shaving of moustaches/ beards, and an ongoing indoctrination of governmental policies (2005).

be how strictly the authorities enforce their rules against religious instructions and mosque attendance by any children under eighteen. Islam is a major pillar of the Uyghur culture, as Christian Tyler puts it (2003:158), and this nurtures a fear of losing an important mechanism for educating young people in religious matters and traditions.⁶⁰ As a consequence, underground educational movements have emerged to teach youngsters about Islam and general codes of moral. Thus, covert Uyghur counter-cultures have mobilized toward these policies of acculturation, and at present day strive to stay away from the authorities' attentive "radar".

The Meshreps have been one such activity, and while the PRC authorities initially endorsed it, this forum is now viewed as a place for potential religious extremism and separatism. Meshreps were established to address social problems like alcohol (embodied by the Olterax, an Uyghur drinking party), drugs and other modern "ills", and by such, focused on codes of appropriate conduct through Islamic ideals (Dautcher 2004:285-7, Millward 2004:17). Western scholars, who have studied the dynamics of the Meshreps, depict their gatherings as sessions where young Uyghur males assemble to recite poetry, sing folksongs or religious songs, dance and share traditional foods. In recent years these events have become more concerned about the Chinese rule, and "the *foci* for Uyghur resistance to Chinese rule" (Gladney 2004a:109). Consequently, the government vigorously endeavours to effectively root out these arrangements.⁶¹

A major incentive for Uyghur counter-cultures to continue with this operation seems to be their aspiration to pass on to the next generations, distinctive markers attached to Islam and "Uyghurness". Despite the lurking dangers of being extradited to the authorities, these Uyghurs still conduct a covert "within-exit" from the Chinese policies, to "fortify" and accentuate their boundaries. As such, they aspire to generate what Tajfel and Turner characterized as intergroup behaviour, at the expense of interpersonal behaviour. This entails a state where Uyghurs do not give in for the

⁶⁰ According to the Human Right Watch report "Devastating Blows: Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang"; Uyghurs "report that the ban is implemented against them more harshly than against members of other ethnic or religious groups, but it applies to all religions in the region. This ban on religious activity among children has no basis in Chinese law and is not known to exist anywhere else in China. The national Law on the Protection of Minors does not include this clause. Neither do similar implementation measures adopted by other provinces. Even Tibet does not have such stringent regulations. The Chinese government has always denied the existence of such a prohibition, which contradicts both China's own constitution and international legal obligations" (2005).

⁶¹ Human Right Watch bulletin (2001): Meshreps were "formally banned in 1994 and labelled as 'illegal organizations' and accused of fanning 'reactionary views' and 'separatist ideas'".

Chinese authorities' "boundary-penetrating technologies" of acculturation. An implication of this is the strengthening of an in-group identity, which paves the way for more behavioural conformity among Uyghurs. Rudelson reasons along similar lines as he presents the following dilemma for the authorities in their policy-framing:

When they suppress Islam, most Uyghurs feel oppressed and oppose the government; when they allow or encourage it, Uyghurs become more content with the government but their strengthened Islamic practise leads them to feel more separate from and apathetic toward Chinese society (1997:48).

With Rudelson's comment in mind, it is immediately important to note that while the authorities' strict policies on Islam may alienate many Uyghurs, the very same policies might deter others. Some Uyghurs are by and large oriented toward the Chinese mindset and thus completely detached from religious practices. On the contrary, other Uyghurs embrace Islam as an objective to staunchly resist the PRC government (Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004:309). In this respect, Fuller and Lipman timely emphasize the dilemma ambitious Uyghurs face, when they seek public education or civil service professions. The marker of Islam distinguishes them from their Han counterparts, but simultaneously seems to be incompatible with prospects for upward social mobility. Regardless of this dilemma, they nevertheless argue that Islam will continue to "be a powerful weapon of identity for Uyghurs" (2004:335-6).

To sum up in brief, Islam seems to be a main pillar of "Uyghurness", and thus serve as an instrumental "boundary-demarcating technology" towards possible acculturative governmental policies. Alongside the factor of ethnicity (an arguably artificial designation by Sheng in the 1930s), the religious component of Islam seems to reinforce an overall Uyghur awareness of "us" versus the "others" (in particular the Hans). Even Uyghur intellectuals who are vigorously against Islamic traditionalism, take part in Islamic cultural practices, and as noted by Rudelson; "to call oneself a Uyghur is also to accept Islam" (1997:47). With the following subchapter, I continue to survey Uyghur markers and more specifically focuses on the PRC's educational policies in Xinjiang. The emerging question is: Among Uyghurs, do governmental policies nurture a feeling of national unity (Chinese nation-building), or on the contrary, reinforce a notion of "us" and the "others" (Uyghur nation-building)?

4.2.3. The PRC's overt and covert educational policies in Xinjiang.

From the inception of the PRC in 1949, the CCP leadership aspired to generate a feeling of national unity and a sense of regime-loyalty among the 55 minority populations and the numerically dominant Hans. In Xinjiang as elsewhere in China, educational institutions became the *foci* for the PRC's nation-building policies.

Arienne M. Dwyer depicts the early years of the regime as a period where national minority identification was considered to be synonymous with nation-building. Thus, their policy was responsive to local conditions. This atmosphere reflected the *de jure* principle of equality and unity among the officially designated ethnic groups (*minzu*), which was emphasized in article 53 of the 1949-interim Constitution. In an egalitarian fashion, minorities were endowed the “freedom to develop their dialects and languages, and to preserve or reform their traditions, customs, and religious beliefs” (2005:1-8).

Paradoxically, as Xinjiang obtained the status as an autonomous region in 1955, the PRC authorities embarked on a set of “harder policies”. Rudelson actually depicts this era as a more comprehensive attempt to “fusion Uyghur culture with Chinese communism” (1997:101). “Boundary-penetrating policies” were among other things directed at a major pillar of Uyghur identity and its cultural production; namely Uyghur language. Dwyer timely notes that while language policies hardly ever attract attention, it nevertheless “permeates all aspect of society”, and as such is an important aspect of the nation-building project (2005:6). The dynamics of language also occupied as central role in Rokkan's studies of state- and nation-building, and he simply noted that “language is fate [...] the most pervasive and obvious stigma of distinctiveness”. Language was thus viewed as a pivotal identity-building and “boundary-maintaining technology”, crucial for the survival of peripheral identity. In this regard, he emphasized something of relevance for my study of Xinjiang as well; “the ability to speak a language is of little value if there is no way in which the individual can use it” (Flora 1999:66, Rokkan 1999:171).

Hence, a critical question for the educational policy in the 1950s, was language of instruction. However, a permanent clarification on this matter did not materialize and the following decades were imprinted in dramatic changes. Prior to 1956, Arabic script was the basis for language instruction, but with the close relationship between

China and the Soviet Union in the 1950s, a modified Cyrillic alphabet became the written standard. Rudelson explains this change as a means to undermine Islamic influences and allegedly to address the challenge of the high illiteracy rate (1997:101). Linda Benson however asserts that the choice of script was more due to China's political allies, and changes of scripts were mainly driven by China's shifting foreign relations. Consequently, when Sino-Soviet relations soured in the 1960s, the Latin alphabet replaced the Cyrillic alphabet (2004:195-7). Rudelson, on the other hand, perceives this change as a policy to sever the "ties between the indigenous people of Xinjiang and their kinsmen across the Sino-Soviet border" (1997:102).

In the early 1980s, the government eventually allowed a return to a slightly modified Arabic script, which coincided with a "softer political climate" for the indigenous people. Today, this remains the official written form for Uyghurs, and Dwyer notes that the PRC government has a particular incentive for a *status quo* here. In terms of boundary-demarcation, this accentuates a linguistic distance to the Central Asian countries, which eventually have adopted the Latin-based alphabet (2005:21-22).

Nevertheless, previous changes of scripts have created divisions between generations of Uyghurs, and this has been viewed by many as a deliberate strategy, combined with the PRC aspiration to undermine their language (Benson 2004:197). Tyler actually depicts a state in many Uyghur families, where the generations can only write to each other in Chinese. Moreover, in the near future, changes of script may actually come again, in order to make it more adjusted to the new era of computer-technologies (2003:261). Another observation has been that the standard Mandarin Chinese has increasingly been favoured as the region's new *lingua franca*, at the expense of other "low quality/ more backward" languages (Dwyer 2005:37).⁶²

In this respect, Dwyer asserts that the year of 1984 was crucial for the authorities' language policies in Xinjiang. Language instruction in Mandarin was introduced at all levels of the education, and eventually paved the way for the present day's state, with instructions from the first grade and onwards. This, at the expense of instructions in Uyghur language, and from the mid-1990s, Dwyer argues that "Uyghur

⁶² Languages with the highest prestige is reflected on the PRC's paper currency, where the phrase "People's Bank of China" is written in the scripts of Mandarin, Uyghur, Mongolian, Tibetan and Zhuang. However, in an interview with the China Central Television, Wang Lequan, the CCP Party Secretary of Xinjiang, asserted that "minority languages in Xinjiang contain only limited amounts of information, and cannot express some more advanced knowledge" (Dwyer 2005:15, 37).

is taught as if it were a second language”. Another paramount change came in 2002, with the termination of instructions in Uyghur language at Xinjiang University. The main objective of the policy was allegedly to avoid that Uyghur students fall behind their Chinese classmates. Moreover, to address the situation of inadequate Uyghur course materials, as well as to improve Uyghurs’ job prospects (2005:38-40).

With Mandarin as the *de facto* number one language of instruction, a mastery of it seems to be a *sine qua non* for secular advancement. Hence, when Uyghur parents enrol their child into the educational system, they have to choose between Uyghur (language) schools and Chinese (language) schools.⁶³ This is truly a dilemma for the parents, as their choice for a Chinese school so profoundly affects their child’s prospects. On the one hand, it entails a radical improvement of their child’s career opportunities, while on the other hand, such an orientation towards the Han society most likely engender a comprehensive impairment of important Uyghur traits (boundary de-accentuation). Education in Uyghur minority schools are expected to bring about the opposite effects, and a prevailing compromise solution for Uyghur parents has been to send their sons to a Chinese- language school, while their daughters enrol at Uyghur-language schools. At least to some extent, this safeguards Uyghur language and traditions, which can then be passed on to future generations (boundary-accentuation) (Tyler 2003: 260, Benson 2004:208, Dillon 2004:26).

The system of Uyghur-language schools (and minority-language schools in general) and Chinese-language schools, has created a *prima facie* favouritism of students from the *minzu*-schools. To the great dismay of Hants, these students face lower demands in the university entrance examination. Graduates of Uyghur and other minority-language schools have to achieve a minimum score of 300, while Han and minority students graduating from Chinese-language schools need a score of 480. The Chinese authorities present this as a proof of their flexibility towards minorities. However, graduates from these minority schools have to spend an additional year studying Chinese, in order to obtain a standard adequate for university studies. This in turn represents a great financial burden for the parents (Benson 2004: 208).

⁶³ Regardless of the school, religious instructions are strictly forbidden, and their child is in any case, largely exposed to the indoctrinating tenets of socialism.



Photo Truls Winje: From a Uyghur school in Kashgar. The blackboard has evidently been used for a lecture in Mandarin. Notice the symbols of PRC's supremacy above, with the Chinese flag and the photo of Chairman Mao.

Secular education in Xinjiang: A streamlined notion of national unity.

The PRC government has had the capacity and will to control that the educational system promotes expedient and “correct” interpretations of the past, while rooting out “undesirable thinking”.⁶⁴ Hence, some Uyghurs have alleged that the authorities deliberately utilize the educational institutions to downplay their history and traditional culture. Moreover, as addressed in a previous section, the extract from Peter Lom’s documentary unmistakably unveiled employment of propaganda slogans in their schooling. Bovdingdon asserts that this line of “large scale coordination of students” perceptions (overt and covert), has prevailed at every level of the educational system (2004:373). The “Xinjiang White Paper” reveals similar educational coordination:

In order to further consolidate and develop the great unity among ethnic groups, since 1983, the government of the region has launched an **‘educational month of unity among ethnic groups’** throughout the whole region every year. In a lively and up-to-date form, the publicity and educational event is carried out in a concentrated, extensive and profound manner, to promote the concepts of equality, unity and progress (my underlining).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ The Human Right Watch report “Devastating Blows: Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang” alleges that the authorities have confirmed their strict surveillance policy in the schools, as a communist cadre gave the following statement to the Xinjiang Legal Daily: “In every school we have established an information network integrated with the local police station, with the teachers in charge of a class acting as the basis [of a network] comprised of classroom heads, section heads, teaching offices and school directors”. The objective was to “teach and guide them” (“them” refers to the educational personnel) (2005).

⁶⁵ PRC Embassy (2003). “History and development of Xinjiang” (part 8). White Paper.

Another telling example has been the lecturing of Xinjiang's history, with the publishing of the textbook "Local history of Xinjiang" in 1992. The authors from Xinjiang University vigorously underscored the historical link between Xinjiang and China proper. Moreover, Xinjiang was depicted as an indisputable part of contemporary China, with an emphasis on the latter part's positive cultural and economical contribution to the region (Bovingdon 2004:368). This book became mandatory for minority students, as well as Han students at colleges/universities in Xinjiang. Every candidate had to pass an examination on its contents to graduate, and the latitude for divergent history interpretations was basically non-existent. To ensure a "proper" understanding of Xinjiang's past, the educational authorities provided a study guide with the most important arguments. Younger students were exposed to an even more streamlined and indoctrinating version, with thirty-six questions and a corresponding set of "correct answers" (Benson 2004:198, Bovingdon 2004:368).



Photo Truls Winje: From another Uyghur schoolyard in Kashgar, depicting Xinjiang's indigenous people surrounded by an advanced PRC modernity (the painting allegedly has a slogan from the former Party boss Jiang Zemin). As I entered the schoolyard to take a photo, I was immediately chased away.

4.2.4. Contested histories: "Appropriate" Uyghur tales versus "splittist" tales.

The preceding subsection illustrated the authorities' monopoly to define the region's past, and in general, all official PRC documents promulgate a strong historical Chinese presence in Xinjiang. The Xinjiang White Paper (2003) is safely embedded in this tradition:

Since the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C-24 A.D.), Xinjiang has been an inseparable part of the unitary multi-ethnic Chinese nation [...].The Chinese central governments of all historical periods exercised military and administrative jurisdiction over Xinjiang. The jurisdiction of the central governments over the Xinjiang region was at times strong and at other times weak, depending on the stability of the period.⁶⁶

This official version of Xinjiang's past is strongly contested by Uyghur nationalists. A diverging and "radical" history interpretation came in connection with the sensational archaeological excavations, three decades ago in Taklimakan Dessert. The findings of 2,000 to 6,000 years old dried out corpses of Caucasian' origins, made the Uyghur historian Turghun Almas assert that these corpses were their Uyghur ancestors. Allegedly, this solved the puzzle of a missing link in their history. When the Tarim basin desiccated 3,000 to 6,000 years ago, the indigenous Uyghurs moved on to the Mongolian steppe. "Solving this puzzle" and referring to the Jews who reclaimed their homeland after 2,000 years, he argued that the Uyghurs were also in a position to legitimately regain their homeland (Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004:314).

Bovingdon depicts this line of reasoning as far-fetched syllogism: "(1) The earliest Uyghurs practiced shamanism; (2) the orientation of the buried suggests that they were shamanists; (3) ergo, the mummies were Uyghur". This is allegedly an observable trend among both Chinese historians and the diametrically opposed Uyghur historians (2004:358). Nevertheless, in the 1980s' atmosphere of official tolerance towards minority tales, Almas was in full action to illuminate that; "the motherland of the Uyghurs is Central Asia". His volume "The Uyghurs" along with two other books, were engulfed by this notion, and thus, he was implicitly denouncing the authorities' history interpretations. With the row of critical junctures at the end of the 1980s (the Tiananmen student movement, "velvet revolutions" in East Europe and a Soviet Union in decline), the regime seized its accommodative policies. Hence, the PRC authorities sanctioned Turghun's work, and generally curbed the popular discourse (2004:363-6).

According to the Chinese scholar Li Sheng, Almas' contributions undermined "the unity of the country and inter-ethnic solidarity in the name of academic research by distorting, cooking up and falsifying history". Consequently, his books with "history-defying fabrications and political mistakes" allegedly aroused grievance and indignation among people from all ethnic groups. In 1990, experts from the CCP

⁶⁶ PRC Embassy (2003). "History and development of Xinjiang" (part 3). White Paper.

convened and found that he “completely violated the Marxist viewpoint on ethnicity and history” (2005:278-9). Moreover, in 1991 the Xinjiang Daily published the 70,000 character essay “A list of one hundred historical errors in the three books including Uyghurs”, vigorously defaming Almas’ contributions “as a historical basis for separatism”. The Chinese authorities went even further to undermine his work when they made it illegal to sell, purchase and possess. However, this strict policy made even more Uyghurs aware of the books’ content and the demand for it skyrocketed (Bovingdon 2004:366-7). Hence, Li emphasizes the need to “uproot the influence of the three books” and embark on an ideological battle, which must be conducted through “positive education”. This implies that “various ethnicities in Xinjiang learn about their local history and ethnic history correctly” (2005:281).

Regardless of the Chinese authorities’ stricter policies toward Uyghur cultural production, they were unable to quell these sentiments in song lyrics, poems and books. The publishing of Ömerjan Alim’s “Remembering mother” in 1994, serves as a good example in this regard, where it arguably encourages Uyghur action (Harris 2005:636-38). However, his follow-up poem in 2000, “Mother you have gone” seems to be coloured by an even stricter political climate, as it reveal sentiments of apathy. “Mother” among Uyghurs, serves as a central icon for the flag and motherland.

Remembering Mother (1994)

For a long time I’ve had bad dreams
I pass my days depressed
See, today bad news has come
Words fail me

Mother, you went to that place
I call mother, no one answers
Heavy suffering has come upon me
Remembering I am sick with grief
Ah...I have eaten grief

Who will I make pay for this grief?
Who will I make pay for this pain?
Destiny has turned out like this
And so I will not ask what...
Ah... what should I do

Mother, you have gone (2000)

People depart this earth when
their lifespan is up
Neither the beggar nor Adam
can remain
None can escape from their
fate
The joy of this life is shared
by all

I can no longer see your face
Your children pray for your soul
Rest peacefully in your grave
dear mother
In my dreams I will be together
with your image.

In 2000, the Uyghur author Zordun Sabir, published the three-volume historical novel “Motherland”, which dealt with the Eastern Turkistan Republic (1944-49). Originally this work passed the official sensors and became popular among the Uyghurs. However, the authorities in the end banned “Motherland”, along with other contributions that were perceived as regime-challenging. In 2005, Human Right Watch published the thorough rapport, “Devastating Blows: Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang”, which among other things illuminated how Chinese authorities reasoned around “diverging and regime- threatening tales”. In February 2002, the Xinjiang Party Secretary released (in Xinjiang Daily) the manifest “For the first time Xinjiang reveals the six forms of sabotaging operations of the separatist forces in the ideological sphere”, instructing the local authorities to sanction these six “separatist techniques”:

1. Using all sorts of news media to propagate separatist thought.
2. Using periodicals, works of literature and art performances; presenting the subject in satires or allegories that give free reign to and disseminate dissatisfaction and propagate separatist thought.
3. Illegally printing reactionary books and periodicals; distributing or posting reactionary leaflets, letters and posters; spreading rumours to confuse the people; instilling the public with separatist sentiment.
4. Using audio and video recordings, such as audio tapes, CDs or VCDs, to incite religious fanaticism and promote “holy war”.
5. Forging alliances with outside separatist and enemy forces, making use of broadcasts, the Internet, and other means to intensify campaigns of reactionary propaganda and infiltration of ideas into public opinion.
6. Using popular cultural activities to make the masses receptive to reactionary propaganda encouraging opposition.⁶⁷

In this atmosphere, the authorities have clamped down on Uyghur authors who allegedly have penetrated the ideological sphere, by publishing and spreading separatist sentiments. Some authors have even been sentenced to jail according to the international association PEN (writers who defend freedom of expression) and Human Right Watch. In 1998, the historian Tohti Muzart was sentenced to fifteen years of prison and in 2005, Nurmemet Yasin was convicted to ten years imprisonment “for publishing a story allegedly inciting separatism”. The latter’s work “The blue pigeon”, employed an allegory of two birds to address Uyghurs’ situation in Xinjiang. One day a blue pigeon is captured in a birdcage by other pigeons and Yasin addresses the great

⁶⁷ Human Right Watch (2005): “Devastating Blows: Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang”.

value of freedom. The Chinese authorities allegedly perceived this story as a resentment of their policies in Xinjiang, and thus found it opportune to sanction it.⁶⁸

As Bovington notes, restrictions and sanctions were only part of the official strategy, as the authorities acknowledged that an important part remained in their nation-building campaigns; namely to “get the story ‘right’ [...] and tell the ‘right’ stories” in a way that makes people read them. This resulted in “A hundred Questions about Xinjiang History”, and a simplified version became educational curriculum. A shrewd new strategy has also been to employ authors with some credibility among its potential readers, to write about historical themes. However, Bovington timely remarks that “Uyghurs contend with the party in many spheres; the ‘contest of histories’ is only one campaign in the larger battle. The party is least likely to win this campaign for Uyghur minds” (2004: 370-74). The popular Uyghur poems below depict typical sentiments toward the PRC, and if not *per se* threatening their state building project in Xinjiang, these sentiments surely illustrates the challenges the communist regime confronts in their nation-building campaigns.⁶⁹

Statue

I saw an statue standing in the park,
covered by a cloak handed with a firearm,
I recognized him but he didn't,
because he stands on top while I was down.

We met each other in this spot long years ago,
with wide open welcome when we were grazing the cattle,
today he eats the walnut alone high above,
while I was sitting down watching him enjoy.

I still remember once he said we were inseparable,
today what happened to this amnesia,
I am so regret for what I have done before,
my eyes were burning and my soul is full of sadness.

Guest

I invited guests to my home,
Let them sit on soft blanket,
But now I can't enter,
The house built by myself.

I respected the guests
Become homeless myself,
No place left for me
in the garden,
I stray in the desert.

I changed the desert to oasis
plenty guests come
for the harvest
They broke the branches of
trees, took the fruits away

I invited guests to my home
Let them sit on soft blanket,
now they hold on the
important spot,
become our boss.

⁶⁸ Opt. Cit. and Norwegian PEN (2006): “Rebiya Kadeer: Kina dreper sine egne”.

¹⁸ “Statue” (1986) by Abdukera'm Hujayof, while “Guest” is a Uyghur folk song. Accessible at Meshrep (www.meshrep.com)

4.3. A summary display of Uyghur means and goals: Three broad strategies.

In previous subchapters, I surveyed **a)** the centre-building elite's endeavours to "lock-in" peripheral actors and resources by external boundary-demarcation and internal hierarchical organization (centre-formation/ state building) and moreover, **b)** their attempted nation-building campaign (cultural standardization) to engender sentiments for China as the "destined motherland". In recent years, this has entailed a "carrot and stick" approach, where the "Strike hard, maximum pressure"-campaign has been designed to contain and deter separatists, while the campaign "Open up the West" was *prime facie* initiated to improve the indigenous peoples' socio-economic prospects ("carrots" to generate goodwill). However, as previously accounted for, this campaign has also orbited the PRC-quest for a strengthened spatial hold on Xinjiang.

Nonetheless, among the Uyghurs, one can arguably observe three broader responses to this "carrot and stick" approach, as some Uyghurs do acculturate, while a majority either ask for a genuine autonomy or a territorial breakaway from the PRC (Fuller and Starr 2004:22). A presentation of these main strategies may provide a adequate summary for the whole chapter. Furthermore, I more thoroughly bring into consideration the theoretical insights from section 3.3., which concerned the potential reach and scope of within-group behavioural-conformity, versus greater in-group variability (individualistic actions) among the Uyghurs.

To shortly recapitulate the most important aspects, one may start with the twofold distinction of Tajfel and Turner, on whether an individual's conduct is mainly determined by individual traits (interpersonal behaviour) or by its social group's codes of conduct (intergroup behaviour). As Bartolini notes, the scope (level of intensity) of an intergroup-conflict is more extensive where individual interaction can be traced back to their group belonging. Another interesting distinction can be made between individuals' perception of a society as "open" (social mobility belief) or "closed" (social group stigmata). In this regard, he asserts that the latter perception fosters intergroup behaviour (strengthening of in-group identity, in-group behavioural conformity and inter-group conflict), while social mobility beliefs generate greater in-group variability (decline of in-group identity, in-group behavioural conformity and inter-group conflict), and consequently, a decreased level of inter-ethnic tension.

We now proceed with a survey of the above-mentioned Uyghur-responses, to what I previously depicted as the Chinese “carrot and stick approach”:

1. Acculturation: These Uyghurs accept an acculturation of their language, culture and Uyghur identity, as means to be fully incorporated into the Chinese political and social order. In order to address the challenges of modernization, Uyghurs have to adjust to a “Han-style modernity”, which is considered to provide a more sophisticated model for social organisation. Few in numbers, these Uyghurs tend to perceive Islam as an impeding factor for this “advanced modernity”, and thus they hold a secular outlook on life. Their sole objection to the communist leadership is the current discriminatory regime, which is a substantial barrier for their principal aspiration; to thrive in a Chinese society with equal access for all its citizens (Fuller and Lipman 2004:345-46, Fuller and Starr 2004:22).

In the case of these few acculturated Uyghurs, one may argue in a Rokkanian terminology that the PRC government’s “boundary-penetrating technologies” have succeeded in overcoming the non-spatial membership space. Their dissociation (“exit”) from important Uyghur markers (“outdated customs”) and “all-embracing entry” into the Chinese society, indicate a hope for a future state, where they may be able to thrive despite their minority background (“social mobility belief”). Thus, interpersonal behaviour progresses with a decline of in-group conformity among this minor segment.

Arguably, a large-scale Uyghur acculturation into the Chinese “mindset” is the preferable endgame for the authorities. Regarding Giesen and Eisenstadt’s distinction of collective identities in section 3.3., one may allege that the PRC government has missionary ambitions for their “superior Han-modernity”. An “entry” into- and partaking of their sacred collective identity, is rendered possible by a reorientation, education and adoption of these normative standards (PRC nation-building). While a few Uyghurs acculturate and adapt to this notion, a large-scale Uyghur acculturation seems unlikely. Despite Rudelson and Jankowiak’s assertion that the overall Uyghur identity is fragile and an artificial construction, they still allege that Uyghurs are the most culturally impenetrable of all the ethnic peoples in China (2004:311).

2. Autonomists, on the other hand attempt to conserve their distinctive markers as an indigenous people. The current state of communist rule in Xinjiang is not only

perceived as discriminatory, but also as a substantial threat to the Uyghur “way of life”. Hence, these autonomists call for a *de facto* autonomy, which is already *de jure* guaranteed in the Chinese constitution. Only by such a dramatic alteration of power, may a dominant Uyghur “voice” manage to control; Han migration (in particular the flow of low-skilled workers), Xinjiang’s overall political processes, and the exploitation of the region’s invaluable natural resources (Fuller and Starr 2004:22).

Their nightmare scenario is a Uyghur future resembling the present situation of Inner Mongolia, where the local Mongol population has been reduced to less than 20 percent (Fuller and Lipmann 2004:345). Due to the massive influx of Han Chinese, Mongols have been pushed to the margins and this has also started to manifest itself in Xinjiang, where the “footprints” of an expanding Han contingent (unofficially about 50 percent of the region’s population) is simply indisputable. The extensive inflow does not merely impair Uyghurs’ job prospects (widespread *guanxi* practice), it also consolidates the regime’s physical hold on the region and expose distinctive markers of “Uyghurness”, to additional pressure.

Hence, a review of the current state in Xinjiang suggests that; Mandarin has become the region’s *lingua franca*, the official “House of Islam” has been institutionalized and comprehensively controlled, regime-biased tales displace Uyghur tales and narratives, the important educative Meshrep-gatherings have been sanctioned, and Chinese architecture and symbols have been erected at a frequent rate throughout Xinjiang, to manifest the supremacy of the PRC. The autonomists obviously aspire to reverse this trend, and while accepting that Xinjiang lies under the overall domain of the PRC, adherence to the authorities’ nation-building project is precluded. Their primary concern is to conserve and strengthen Uyghur distinctiveness, and as such cultivate a non-spatial distance to the other indigenous people in the region. In the case of the Han Chinese, this extends to comprise a spatial distance (physical distance), preferably by witnessing a large-scale return of Hans to China hinterland.

As a consequence of the autonomists’ preference for an increased non-spatial (social) distance between Uyghurs and in particular the Hans, one may expect the continuation of, or an increased degree of in-group behavioural conformity (intergroup behaviour). This is nurtured by the widespread perception of social group stigmata, as

important positions in the labour market and within the CCP, in reality are reserved for the Hans. Hence, I contend that many Uyghurs do struggle with such frustration on a daily basis, particularly as the Han contingent expands further south. Unless the PRC government addresses this grievance, social tension may increase and simply make harmonization between Uyghurs and Hans an inconceivable outcome.

3. Separatists by and large share the same ends as autonomists, but advocate a full territorial breakaway (transcendence) from Chinese domination, in order to embark on an unrestrained cultivation of Uyghur distinctiveness and the continuation of their “glorious past”. Co-existence with the “outer-group” (Hans) under the auspices of a PRC government is simply an anathema, and I assume that intergroup behaviour more strongly displace in-group variability. This depiction particularly applies for the violent separatists, who in 2007 run a significant risk of being fatally sanctioned. The separatists may be divided into subgroups of secularists and religious activists, who employ non-violent, alternatively violent strategies. (Fuller and Starr 2004:23). Thus, I suggest the following simplified illustration of separatists and their activities:

Table 5.	Non-violent strategy	Violent strategy
Secularists	<p>1) Endgame: A secular East Turkistan/Uyghuristan.</p> <p>Credo: Internal democratization and a peaceful solution of the Xinjiang-question.</p> <p>-Uyghur nationalists within Xinjiang have to keep a low profile in order to avoid the regime’s “radar”.</p> <p>-Uyghur exile groups around the world voice their grievance to attract international sympathy.</p>	<p>3) Endgame: A secular East Turkistan/ Uyghuristan.</p> <p>-No officially known secular groups are in operation, although the PRC authorities link western exile groups with acts of terrorism.</p> <p>-Some secular expatriate individuals from Central Asia, may be willing to travel to Xinjiang if major uprisings erupt.</p>
Islamic activists	<p>2) Endgame: An Islamic East Turkistan state or a grand Central Asian Islamic caliphate, based on the rule of Sharia.</p> <p>-Religious Uyghur individuals with a low profile in present day Xinjiang. These Islamic Uyghurs are under a constant surveillance by the authorities, and many have already been incarcerated.</p>	<p>4) Endgame: An Islamic East Turkistan state or a grand Central Asian Islamic caliphate, based on the rule of Sharia.</p> <p>Credo: Jihad against the infidel China.</p> <p>-A variety of groups like the East Turkistan Islamic Movement, East Turkistan Islamic Party, with others have emerged. The PRC government alleges that they have a link to the Al-Qaeda network.</p>

Fuller and Starr timely note that an increasing number of militant separatist groups embedded in an Islamic ideology, have emerged the last few years. Some of these movements have forged links with similar groups in countries adjoining Xinjiang, and thus, by violent means, endeavoured to undermine the PRC state- and nation-building campaigns (2004:24). However, as accounted for in section 4.1., this has been effectively addressed by the Chinese authorities as they bandwagoned with the U.S. in

the “War on terrorism”, and incorporated the concept of the “three ills of separatism, extremism and terrorism” in the charter of the SCO. This has rendered it utterly difficult for non-violent expatriate activists, as well as Uyghur terrorists to continue their operations in the neighbouring countries. Hence, I contend that the government’s hold on the region is historically strong and by and large uncontested (a strong manifestation of the PRC’s boundary-accentuation in spatial sphere).

To establish an accurate overview of Uyghurs’ preferred endgame for Xinjiang is evidently impossible, as the region is a *terra incognita* for conducting independent surveys. Nevertheless, Fuller and Star assert that the autonomists clearly constitute the largest group of politically active Uyghurs. Only a few Uyghurs might be considered to be “outright acculturated”, while separatists as a group, probably constitute a “distant third” (2004:24-25). A survey by the Hui scholar Yang Shengmin in 2004, suggested that 67 percent respectively 25 percent of the Uyghur respondents were “very proud of” or “proud of” their ethnic group. Interestingly, 60 percent respectively 31 percent were “very proud” or “proud of” being a Chinese national. Moreover, 43 percent respectively 45 percent of the Uyghurs “fully agreed” or “agreed”, that “separatist activities are harmful to the majority of the people”. Consequently, Yang concluded that ethnic separatism “do not enjoy popular support” (2006:10-13).

While one could write a separate chapter about methodological difficulties attended with Yang’s survey, I will confine myself to contend that these “sensational” numbers, most likely reflect a concern among the respondents to provide the “correct responses”. Although Uyghur surveyors conducted the survey among the Uyghur respondents, the latter part does still not have any incentives to reveal their separatist sentiments. Quite the contrary, the Chinese authorities have effectively demonstrated that a possessor of such attitudes is simply a *persona non grata* in Xinjiang.

The Uyghurs I talked with in Xinjiang manifested sentiments for a breakaway from China, but emphasised that the Chinese government would effectively clamp down on any uprisings. Consequently, many Uyghurs do not support separatist rebellions as their sacrifice would simply be in vain. An unbiased survey among “unrestrained” Uyghurs, would probably reveal that a majority have sentiments for a breakaway, but as they have made peace with the new realities, they refrain from

advocating or participating in such activities. However, Gladney has timely noted that an independent East Turkistan has about the similar prospects as the Central Asian countries. This implies a state of relatively poorer conditions, and with this in mind, Uyghurs' enthusiasm for independence may be considerably moderated (2004b:393).

Another important aspect to be addressed is whether a breakaway from Chinese domination has popular support among Xinjiang's Kazakhs, Huis, Kyrgyzs, and Mongols. Rudelson and Jankowiak assert that the PRC government has nurtured local conflicts between the Uyghurs and these ethnic groups, by disproportionately strengthening the voice of the latter groups (2004:305). A prospected Uyghur-dominated state on the other hand, would most likely undermine the influence of these groups, and hence, they rather prefer a continuation of Chinese domination (Fuller and Lipman 2004:351). In the event of independence or large-scale rebellions, Gladney even predicts a state of equally intense clashes between Muslim peoples as between Han Chinese and Muslims (2004b:395).

The latter suggestion is also substantiated by the profound suspicion that many Uyghurs nourish to the Huis (non-Turkic Chinese-speaking Muslims). Huis have even been referred to as a "wobbling watermelon"; at times siding with the Uyghurs and in other cases with the Han Chinese. Some Uyghurs have also depicted them as "Muslim (green) on the outside and Communist (red) on the inside". Consequently, Huis have an intermediate function, which render it difficult for either the Uyghurs or the Hans to completely trust them (Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004:311-12). One may argue that the latent tension and conflict between the Muslim Uyghurs, Huis and Kazakhs, has been masterfully manipulated by the PRC government, as it now constitutes an invaluable "locking-in" mechanism in their state building campaign.

As a natural closure of this section, the following considerations emerge: While a few Uyghur gladly acculturate into the "Han modernity", a remaining majority of discontent Uyghurs (autonomists and separatists) stay behind in a current state where; **a)** genuine autonomy is out of reach, and **b)** where all imaginable "exit-strategies" for a territorial secession of Xinjiang, seem to have been effectively precluded. In the perspective of Rokkan, a variety of "locking-in" mechanisms have simply made the penalty for overt separatist activities and uprisings too severe to be considered. The

authorities' monitoring and sanctioning of "splittists activities" and dissent, have had the ripple effect of restricting Uyghurs in their performance of such distinctive markers as language, religion, important customs and communication of "inappropriate" Uyghur tales/narratives. This is particularly the case for Uyghurs in the public space. Thus, they have to preserve their identity in the private realms of life.

Arguably, one may assert that Uyghur individuals refusing to acculturate into a "Chinese mindset" are left with two alternative courses of "rational action". The first option is a continuation of the current life in Xinjiang, where they express *prima facie* "loyalty" to the communist regime, while practicing their distinct features more discretely at home. In reality, this is a "within-exit" from the authorities' nation-building project, where Uyghur individuals only learn to master the most necessary skills (Mandarin, "Xinjiang's correct history" and the tenets of socialism) to survive within the framework of the PRC. In the private sphere, they continue to cultivate the most important traits of "Uyghurness", and by this effort render possible a continuation of their cultural heritage, and the partaking of future Uyghur generations.

For some Uyghurs, the incentive to stay in Xinjiang has simply perished. After a visit in Xinjiang in late August 2001, Dru Gladney reported a sense of disillusionment and disappointment among Uyghur activists. One of his acquaintances mentioned; "We've given up our independence, we just want to emigrate". Thus, in a Hirschmanian jargon, "loyalty" to the Chinese regime or the "voice" of dissent "for many Uyghurs, have turned into exit" (2004b:382). Interestingly, only as Uyghur individuals pursue Hirschman's "exit"-alternative from Xinjiang, can oppositional voices continue to be heard. This course of action has evident costs in terms of leaving your family, friends and hometown behind, a classical dilemma for all refugees and migrants. Nevertheless, many migrating Uyghurs have concluded that this is the only viable option to raise the Uyghur voice. Chapter 5 now proceeds with a survey of the Uyghur diaspora, and their undertakings to discredit the PRC regime internationally.

Chapter 5:

Diasporic voices for an independent East Turkistan.



Photo Semet Abla: Exile Uyghurs demonstrating against the PRC government in front of the Norwegian parliament on February 3, 2007. The occasion was to honour the victims from the Ghulja-uprising in 1997.

5.0. The Uyghur Diaspora: Voices for East Turkistan.

Within present-day Xinjiang, a prevailing trend has been the effective silencing of regime-critical Uyghur voices, as the political climate by no means invites to dissent. The Chinese authorities continuously keep a watchful eye on potential underground “splittists” along with clamping down on overt Uyghur voice. Thus, large-scale public demonstrations which hallmarked the region in the 1990s, seem to have been rendered utterly difficult in 2007. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the PRC government aspired to exert further control on Xinjiang’s course of events, and overt as well as covert opposition have been profoundly sanctioned. Consequently, only regime-endorsing Uyghur voices (communist cadres and some scholars) stressing their allegiance to their “beloved motherland China” can be heard today in Xinjiang itself. In this regard, Gladney observes that many Uyghurs have abandoned the idea of voicing their aspirations for independence in Xinjiang, and rather migrate (“exit”) to a country with a greater latitude for oppositional “Hirschmanian voice” (2004b:382-83).

After several stages of Uyghur migration the last century, Yitzhak Shichor estimates that approximately 500,000 Uyghurs constitute the current Uyghur diaspora (Petersen 2006:65). Numerically speaking, neighbouring Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan accommodate a majority of these Uyghurs, while many have also moved on to Turkey, Western Europe, Australia and North America. In the last decade, many of these Uyghurs have initiated exile groups to illuminate the pressure on Uyghurs in Xinjiang, and to discredit the Chinese regime.

In section 5.1, I proceed to give an account of the major exile Uyghur groups, their aspirations and employed means, along with their actual achievements. Section 5.2 continues with a survey of the latitude for Uyghur voice in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as these countries constitute a major centre for Uyghur expatriates. Finally, in section 5.3., I scrutinize Uyghur voices on the World Wide Web, and their activities of cyber-separatism. In this regard, a main observation is the paramount importance of internet as a medium to rally international sympathy for the Uyghurs’ situation, to undermine the PRC’s international legitimacy, and to mobilize and coordinate Uyghurs worldwide. Moreover, each section also contains a discussion on how the PRC authorities endeavour to defame the Uyghur diaspora.

5.1. The mobilization of the Uyghur diaspora against the PRC government.

With the inception of the PRC in 1949, Uyghurs leaders had to demonstrate their allegiance to the new communist regime, or flee from Xinjiang to avoid persecution. Along with about 2,000 other Uyghurs, the East Turkistan Republic's Mehmet Emin Bughra and Isa Yusuf Alptekin escaped in 1949 to Kashmir in India. In 1955, both moved on to find permanent shelter in Turkey, and from their base in Istanbul, they campaigned for Uyghur independence. Bughra became the father figure of the Uyghur diaspora until he departed in 1965, and at that stage, Alptekin succeeded to be the uncontested "patriarch" until he passed away in 1995 (Tyler 2003:223-25).

Yitzhak Shichor asserts that neither Bughra nor Alptekin embarked on any serious attempts to establish a universal Uyghur forum to generate support from the West. This may be explained by that time's limited communications technology, the isolated PRC government's indifference to international criticism (especially during the Cultural Revolution), the fact that the bulk of the diaspora was situated in the Soviet Union, and finally, that the West at the height of the Cold War, had more precarious concerns than the fate of oppressed minorities (2007).

From the 1970s, Isa Yusuf Alptekin's son Erkin Alptekin also got a paramount role in the exile community. With his profession in Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, news and "democratic propaganda" were broadcasted into the PRC and the Soviet Union.⁷⁰ Eventually, he left the radio channel but continued to advocate the cause of East Turkistan, along with initiating cooperation with exiled leaders from Tibet and Inner Mongolia. In 1991, Alptekin established the Eastern Turkistan Union in Europe (ETUE) in Munich, and were among the founders of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO) the same year. From the mid-1990s and onwards, a wide range of expatriate Uyghur organisations emerged to "legitimately represent" the silenced Uyghur voice in Xinjiang. Uyghur groups established competing world-wide fora, all proclaiming to be the sole and authentic representative body for the Uyghurs. In the remaining part of this section, I will provide a closer examination of the main groups' history of origin, their policies, their recent accomplishments and thus, their relative strength in 2007.

⁷⁰ Following the opening of diplomatic relations between the PRC and the U.S., the radio station's Uyghur division was dismantled in 1979. This was seen as a concession from the U.S. authorities to the PRC government (Shichor 2007).

One of these exile groups is the Washington-based East Turkistan National Freedom Center (ETNFC), which was established in 1996. After a careful survey of the various groups' content and accentuation, ETNFC evidently seems to be the group that is **a)** the most insistent on independence from the PRC's domination, and **b)** focuses more on an overall East Turkistani identity and less on Uyghur ethnicity. On September 14, 2004, this group proclaimed the establishing of the Government-in-exile of East Turkistan Republic, with Anwar Yusuf Turani as the "designated" prime minister. The inception of their "reign" was heralded as Turani proclaimed:

For years, the people of East Turkistan have wondered: does anyone hear them? Is there a voice abroad for East Turkistan? Is there any entity, a government, an authority that speaks for them? That wondering: that longing has ended. East Turkistan has found its voice one again [...]. We, the East Turkistani community in exile have established a government of the Republic of East Turkistan in exile.⁷¹

Moreover, ETNFC adopted a comprehensive constitution, which comprised 70 articles that dictated the "new regime's" *modus operandi*. In article 8, it was stated that the government-in-exile of East Turkistan Republic "has been accepted as the sole organ that has the authority over the people of East Turkistan in terms of representing East Turkistan Republic until East Turkistan will be liberated from the rule by imperialist Communist China". According to article 2, "the character of the state is a democratic, unified and fully legal state that respects all human rights".⁷²

In addition, the constitution in a detailed fashion outlined the people of East Turkistan (Turkistanis: Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Farsi speaking Tajiks and Mongols), the state's national symbols (flags and emblems), holidays (national day, religious days, memorial days), state language (Uyghur) and other official languages (Kazakh and Kyrgyz), official religion (Islam), the electoral system (electoral constituencies, cabinet of 12 persons, parliament with 61 representatives on a four year term (2004-08), the parliaments function to pass laws and decrees etc.), and aspirations for international support against the PRC. Interestingly, the constitution also comprises several articles which address how Uyghur "traitors" and collaborators with the PRC government, will be punished and denied any ministerial or parliamentary posts.⁷³

⁷¹ ETNFC (2004). "Declaration of the formation of the Government-in-exile of the Republic of East Turkistan".

⁷² ETNFC (2004). "The constitution of the Government-In-Exile of the Republic of East Turkistan".

⁷³ Opt. Cit.

Another important diasporic organisation was the East Turkistan National Congress (ETNC), which originated from a meeting in 1998, when 40 Uyghur leaders and about 300 representatives from 18 countries, initiated the Eastern Turkistan National Center in Istanbul. The Chinese authorities became disturbed by this event and pressured the Turkish authorities to restrict the diasporic Uyghur voice. Consequently, the following year in 1999, the delegates convened at their new base in Munich, to establish a permanent exile organisation known as the East Turkistan National Congress (Shichor 2007). In their “Appeal to world leaders” in 2001, ETNC asserted that it constituted the sole umbrella organisation for the Uyghurs:

It is the only legitimate representative organ of the Uyghur people and speaks and acts on behalf of that people in the free world [...]. The East Turkistan National Congress was founded as the international democratically elected representative body of the Uyghur people. Delegates to the ETNC are elected by the million Uyghurs in exile. The ETNC maintains close contacts with the people in East Turkistan and speaks on their behalf so long as they are prevented from doing so by the Chinese authorities.⁷⁴

The ETNC continued its operations until 2004, when the organisation merged with the World Uyghur Youth Congress and heralded the era of a new umbrella organisation, the World Uyghur Congress (WUC). The leadership of WUC proclaims to “serve the collective interests of the Uyghur people [...] as the sole legitimate organization in the world”.⁷⁵ Its expressed purpose is to “use peaceful, nonviolent, and democratic means to promote democracy, human rights and religious freedom for the Uyghur people”.⁷⁶ Moreover, the leadership of WUC aspires to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Xinjiang question, through the means of dialogue and negotiations with the Chinese authorities. Shichor timely points out how important it was for these activists to emphasize their nonviolent nature, in the new “post-September 11 environment of heightened fear and increased monitoring” (2007).

In April 2007, I met with the WUC delegates Islam Tursun, Rozimuhammed Abdulbakiev and Khahriman Gojamberdi in Central Asia, and urged them to outline their preferable end state for Xinjiang. They were harmonized in the desired outcome; a multiethnic and secular East Turkistan (deliberately avoiding the name Uyghuristan), modelled after Kemal Attaturk’s Turkey. Gojamberdi expressed that while Islam is

⁷⁴ ETNC (2001). “Appeal to World Leaders”.

⁷⁵ WUC (2005). “Introducing the World Uyghur Congress”.

⁷⁶ Opt. Cit.

“like a jacket for the Uyghurs”, it is not suitable for the purpose of organizing a state. Moreover, they all expressed inclusiveness toward the Han Chinese as citizens of an independent East Turkistan, although the WUC considers them to be illegally settled. This is however provided that the Hans accept to be citizens of East Turkistan and Central Asia, which the following WUC document also emphasizes:

East Turkistan is the homeland of the Turkic speaking Uyghurs and other Central Asian peoples such as Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tatars and Tajiks [...]. East Turkistan is located beyond the logical boundary of China, the Great Wall. Historically and culturally, East Turkistan is part of Central Asia, not of China. The people of East Turkistan are not Chinese; they are Turks of Central Asia.⁷⁷

Regarding the organisation of WUC, about 30 democratically elected representatives on a two-year basis currently constitute the top leadership of the Congress. At the first Congress in 2004, Erkin Alptekin was designated as the president of the WUC for the period of 2004-06. In 2006, Rebiya Kadeer was unanimously elected as the new president for the term 2006-08, while Alptekin became WUC’s new chief advisor. Other prominent community leaders from Uyghur subgroups worldwide were nominated and elected for the remaining board posts. Altogether, the WUC’s leadership are comprised of delegates from the following 13 countries; Germany, United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Holland, France, Austria, Turkey, Australia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.⁷⁸

Moreover, the most noticeable Uyghur subgroups affiliated with the WUC are among others the Uyghur American Association (UAA) and their initiated Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP), Uyghur Canadian Association (UCA), East Turkistan Culture and Solidarity Association (Turkey), Eastern Turkistan Foundation (Turkey), Eastern Turkistan Europe Union, Uighur U.K. Association, Ittipak (Kyrgyzstan), Ittipak (Kazakhstan) and the International Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation (the U.S.).⁷⁹

⁷⁷ WUC (2005). “East Turkistan”.

⁷⁸ WUC (2006). “Leadership of the World Uyghur Congress”.

⁷⁹ Along with heading the WUC, Kadeer was also elected to be the new leader for the UAA in 2006. Moreover, in 2005 she initiated the International Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation (IUHRDF). According to Amy Reger in UAA, the difference between the IUHRDF and Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) is that the former has a particular focus on “issues affecting Uyghur women and children”, while the latter has a general focus on human rights (personal communication 2007).

In order to improve their organisational capacity and to train present and future leaders of the Uyghur community, the WUC has embarked on a co-operation with the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO). Ever since its inauguration in 1991, the UNPO has been a paramount medium for unrepresented nations (currently 69), not recognised in international fora such as the UN. Simultaneously with his commissions in the Uyghur community, the former WUC leader Alptekin has also been one of UNPO's most prominent leaders. Thus, UNPO has been strongly involved in the Uyghur diaspora and the situation in Xinjiang. In May 2007, UNPO hosted a workshop for approximately 50 Uyghur leaders and activists in Hague, Holland. On their agenda were grass-roots democratisation, human rights activism and how to enlist "international forums and courts in the campaign for Uyghur human rights".⁸⁰

The Uyghur diaspora and in particular the organisation of WUC, got a fair wind in 2005, when Kadeer was released after 6 years of Chinese imprisonment. This was only rendered possible after intense diplomatic pressure from the U.S. ahead of an official visit by Condoleezza Rice the same year. Kadeer was arrested by Chinese authorities on her way to meet an U.S. congressional delegation in 1999.⁸¹ In 2000, she was sentenced to eight years of imprisonment, allegedly revealing Chinese state secrets. The same year, Amnesty International adopted her as their prisoner of conscience and on several occasions arranged campaigns to pressure the PRC authorities. In 2004, the Norwegian Rafto Peace Foundation designated Kadeer as their laureate. As the international "War on terrorism" campaign had to some extent smudged the activities of all Uyghur counter forces (peaceful as well as violent initiatives), this designation endowed the diaspora with much needed positive exposure. Altogether, these events combined with an intense lobbying from the Uyghur diaspora made the U.S. government more concerned about Kadeer's fate, and hence, they stepped up their pressure on the PRC government. Upon her release in 2005, Kadeer was assigned political asylum in Washington, USA, the main base for Uyghur diasporic groups lobbying in North America.

⁸⁰ WUC (2007): "Training the leaders of tomorrow".

⁸¹ In 1997, Kadeer founded the "Thousand Mothers Movement" to provide Uyghur women with job training and employment. She also established evening schools for Uyghurs. Prior to this, she also held several official commissions in the PRC, but became a *person non grata* by the meeting with an official U.S. delegation. In addition, her regime-dissenting Uyghur husband had already attained political asylum in the U.S. and his criticism of the PRC was not well taken in Beijing.

The WUC soon enrolled Kadeer in their organisation and in 2005, they adopted a resolution which designated her as “the Mother of the Uyghur nation and the leader of East Turkestan”.⁸² In 2006, she was unanimously elected as the new leader of the WUC and the Uyghur American Association. In a hectic year as the new leader, Kadeer has been able to get private audience with such prominent leaders as Kofi Annan and on June 5, 2007, the U.S. president George W. Bush.⁸³



Photo: UAA



Photo: UAA

These meetings are of great symbolic value for the Uyghur diaspora and a diplomatic sting to the Chinese authorities, who were obviously provoked by Bush’s meeting with Kadeer. In a press conference on June 7, 2007, the PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu defamed both Kadeer and the U.S. involvement:

Every one knows well what kind of person Rebiya Kadeer is. She is a convicted criminal. The relevant remarks and activities of the US are blatant interference in China's internal affairs. We express strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition to it.⁸⁴

Similar reactions were generated in 2006, when Kadeer was mentioned among the main favourites for the Nobel Peace Prize. The Vice-Secretary of the CCP in Xinjiang, Nuer Baikeli stated at that time that Kadeer had no qualifications for the prize. He also rejected the notion that she is the “Mother of all Uyghurs”, based on her alleged errors as a mother for her own children.⁸⁵ Moreover, when a delegation from the Norwegian parliament visited the Chinese Vice-Foreign minister Zhang Yesui in 2006, he and other PRC officials made it clear that a Nobel peace prize to Kadeer would be damaging for the relationship between Norway and China (Fyhn 2006).

⁸² WUC (2005). “WUC Holds Its Second Executive Meeting”.

⁸³ The Uyghurs I talked with in Xinjiang were unaware of Kadeer’s meeting with Bush, but became enthused when I informed about it.

⁸⁴ PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007). “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Jiang Yu's Regular Press Conference on 7 June, 2007”.

⁸⁵ PRC Government (2006). “Xinjiang party head says Kadeer is a separatist”.

With Kadeer as the new WUC leader, it is evident that the organisation and the diaspora in general have created a “matriarch”, who will continue to be the most paramount spiritual figure in the years to come.⁸⁶ With her charisma, peaceful appearance and adherence to moderate Islam, I contend that the Uyghur diaspora has found the most expedient leader to attract attention and sympathy from international leaders and an international audience. Uyghurs’ situation in Xinjiang slowly makes an entry into their awareness, which at previous stages exclusively centred around the Tibet question. Another important aspect to be considered is Kadeer’s reputable name among Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Due to involvements in charity organisations prior to her incarceration in 1999, she is renowned and respected throughout the region.⁸⁷

Chinese authorities and scholars are obviously concerned about the impact of Kadeer at the international scene, and the incarceration of her sons in Urumqi seems to be a strategy to silence her vigorous voice.⁸⁸ However, this has only provided her with more international support and simultaneously further smudged the PRC government’s reputation. Finally, Kadeer’s rise has altered the balance among the Uyghur diasporic groups in favour of the WUC. Previously, there have been some disputes between the ETNFC’s exiled government and the WUC, where the former part accused WUC under Alptekin’s leadership, to embark on a compromise-oriented policy towards the PRC, and not vigorously enough champion the cause for independence. WUC on the hand implicitly denounced the exiled government’s authority, by as previously mentioned, depicting itself as the sole legitimate world-wide Uyghur organisation.

By examining issued statements from the ETNFC’s leader Turani in 2006, he did no longer emphasize the role of the exile-government. Since August 2006, only two statements have been published on the government’s webpage. Now it seems to be in a phase of inactivity, with the last press release dated back to January 2007. Thus, Shichor asserts that the ETNFC has actually disbanded as an organisation (2007), and the WUC’s Semet Ablā confirmed this to me in a personal correspondence (August 2007). Ablā argues that this was resulted by their marginal support and he perceives

⁸⁶ In interviews with the WUC representatives from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, they revealed a genuine admiration and enthusiasm for Kadeer as the new leader. These diasporic leaders have faith in her skills, working capacity and support among all Uyghur people. Notwithstanding, it was stressed that her impact would be even more profound if she learns to master English.

⁸⁷ According to Uyghurs I met around in Xinjiang, all Uyghurs know about Kadeer and do respect her.

⁸⁸ UAA (2007). According to the UAA, Kadeer’s son Ablikim was sentenced to nine years in prison on April 17, 2007, as he was found guilty on the charges of “instigating and engaging in secessionist activities”. The other children have also been sanctioned in various ways.

the operation of the ETNFC as a wrong step “in the political mobilizations of the Uyghurs”. Consequently, the WUC now appears to be unchallenged and the expatriate Uyghur community is comparatively more unified than just a few months ago.

Increased internal harmonization renders possible a more effective Uyghur voice at the international stage. The absence of severe internal disputes obviously presents the community in a more favourable light, and provides various governments with a clear overview on who to deal with. Moreover, this may facilitate an effective cooperation with other expatriate groups representing the voice of Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Taiwan, and thus, further strengthen the pressure on the Chinese authorities. With the upcoming Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, the leaders of these communities have a unique possibility to coordinate their efforts and attain exposure from the world press. While I doubt that these leaders have the capacity and willingness to initiate large scale rebellions inside China during the Olympics, one may expect some joint manifestations both in Beijing and abroad.⁸⁹

Uyghur diasporic activities: From the Chinese authorities’ point of view.

Previously in this section, I presented several extracts from the PRC government’s reactions to the rise of Rebiya Kadeer. In the remaining part, I illustrate how the Chinese authorities perceive the Uyghur diaspora and how they attempt to defame their operations. The Chinese scholar Li Sheng asserts that “East Turkistan splittist forces” have been on unsafe grounds ever since September 11, 2001. Thus, they have been forced to change tactics, where their current campaign is “deceptively” embedded in the name of “striving for human rights” and the right to “national determination” (2005:291). In this regard, Li allegedly observes the following trends (2005:291-3):

1. These groups aspire to smudge the name of the PRC government by depicting a situation of state-initiated terrorism in Xinjiang. Thus, they with deceptive endeavours, hope to stay clear of “the charges of being violent and terrorist”, and “to get away from the punishment they well deserve for their terrorist acts”.
2. The diaspora is “speeding up internal consolidation and planning to build the “exile government””. With exile arrangements like the ETNFC and the WUC in mind, Li

⁸⁹ According to the Kyrgyz Ittipak leader and WUC delegate Abdulkakiev, the WUC already started to plan peaceful actions during the reign of Alptekin. Their means may include petitions, demonstrations and protest letters.

denounces their operations as “the perverse act of a small number of splittists”. These groups “have never been, nor can ever be, representative of people of all ethnic origins in Xinjiang”. Therefore, he depicts this as a simple trick to “confuse and deceive the international public opinion”, and by all practical means to derail the international anti-terror campaign.

3. “East Turkistan terrorist organisations” are allegedly still “sticking to violent and terrorist means”, such as establishing terror camps and training cells to continue their activities. At this stage, Li refers to a rumour that some of these forces allegedly threatened to crash a hijacked plane in the big dam at the Three Gorges.⁹⁰

4. “The splittist forces” are operating under the banner of “political resolution of the Xinjiang question”, in an attempt to involve the international community and facilitate a referendum. Li asserts that “unity and integration is the trend of historical evolution”, and that there is no genuine “Xinjiang question” to be addressed. Hence, the approach of “political resolution”, only represents a “child-like mentality” (2005:291-93).

Concerning the future developments of anti-separation and anti-terror struggles in Xinjiang, Li finds wisdom in the following old Chinese idiom; “the tree craves calm, but the wind will not subside”. In other words, he predicts that “the fight between separatism and unity” will intensify and challenge the regime in the years to come (2005:293). With the Uyghur diaspora in mind, I have already demonstrated how vigorously the PRC government attempts to defame these activists at the international stage. Moreover, they pressure countries that have been a safe haven for the Uyghur diaspora. Through regional cooperation arrangements like the SCO, the Chinese authorities have presented various incentives for the member countries to sanction exiled Uyghur activists. A main concern for all the diasporic groups has been the extradition of Uyghur activists from Central Asia and Pakistan, to the custody of the PRC government. Especially disturbing was the extradition of the Canadian citizen Huseyin Celil from Uzbekistan. On April 2007, he was sentenced to life in prison by a PRC court, due to allegedly “splittist” and terrorist plots.⁹¹

⁹⁰ I contend that Li and other Chinese scholars with him in the book “Xinjiang of China: Its Past and Present”, at times tend to present tendentious depictions and to get tangled in a hotchpotch of rumours, ideological utopia, and operate without the necessary scientific humility. Thus, it is rendered more difficult to entrust findings and conclusions that actually are perceptive and illuminative for the field of study. However, one should not forget that these scholars are expected to have a certain allegiance to the regime and not distribute findings or hypothesis in public, that might put the authorities in an unfavourable light.

⁹¹ On June 19, 2007, the U.S. Congress urged the PRC government to immediately release Celil and Kadeer’s children (Resolution 497).

5.2. Uyghur voices in Central Asia: The cases of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

In April 2007, I went to Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan and Almaty in Kazakhstan to meet with Uyghur exile leaders that **a)** stand as representatives for the largest Uyghur expatriate communities in the world, and **b)** are central in passing on information about recent developments in Xinjiang. Due to these countries proximity with Xinjiang, they have been the natural first destination for migrating Uyghurs. Consequently, in 2007, approximately 300,000 Uyghurs reside in Kazakhstan and 50,000 in Kyrgyzstan.⁹² Moreover, news and bulletins have made its way back and forth across the borders, along with the movement of the commuting Uyghur tradesmen.

5.2.1. Kazakhstan: China's most favoured ally in Central Asia.

Khahriman Gojamberdi is the leader of Ittipak ("Solidarity"), the main society for Uyghurs in Kazakhstan and chairs their political organ, the People's Party of Uyghuristan.⁹³ Ittipak is the sole relevant organisations for the Uyghurs in Kazakhstan, and it is organized with several branches to attract different segments of Uyghurs.⁹⁴ According to Gojamberdi, about 3,000 to 4,000 active members constitute the core of Ittipak, and by and large finance the society's activities. These Uyghur activists keep a very low profile in order to avoid undesirable attention and sanctions from the Kazakh authorities.

Ittipak's main focus is to preserve Uyghur distinctive markers in Kazakhstan and to address the situation in Xinjiang. Uyghur tradesmen and migrants from Xinjiang often seek out Gojamberdi and the Ittipak organisation, to communicate the recent news from the Chinese region. Ittipak then passes on this information to the wider Uyghur diaspora, along with mediating information from the outside world to Uyghurs in Xinjiang. However, after the inception of the Shanghai Five in 1996 and its successor the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2001, regional cooperation and heavy pressure from China have greatly restricted the voice of the Uyghur diaspora in Central Asia. Eventually, the Chinese concept of the "three evils, separatism,

⁹² Khahriman Gojamberdi, the leader of Ittipak in Kazakhstan provided me with the Kazakh numbers, while Rozimuhamed Abdulkakiev, the leader of Ittipak in Kyrgyzstan presented the Kyrgyz numbers. Concerning the latter figure, Abdulkakiev asserts that the actual number is much higher as many Uyghurs during the Soviet times, rather chose to register as Uzbeks due to the low standing of Uyghurs.

⁹³ Other places referred to as Uyghuristan Freedom Association.

⁹⁴ Other scholars have previously depicted these branches as independent organisations, but according to Gojamberdi, there are no other independent organisations. Previously, Nozugym, an independent Uyghur women group operated in Kazakhstan. However, their operations seized with the mysterious death of the leader Dilbirim Samsakova in May 2001.

extremism and terrorism” also came in vogue among the Central Asian states, and the Chinese authorities have vigorously aspired to link the diaspora with these regime-threatening “evils”. This effort has been largely successful, and Gojamberdi alleges that the domestic latitude for the Uyghur diaspora to criticize China’s mode of operations, has been significantly reduced since 1996.

Thenceforward, the Chinese authorities presented several incentives (diplomatic pressure) for these countries to curtail Uyghur expatriates’ activities on their own soil. In particular, a weighty argument has been China’s economical rise and prospected status as a financial *primus inter pares* in the region. The ripple effect for Ittipak has been an intensified surveillance from the Kazakh authorities, along with accusations that the Uyghur diaspora jeopardizes the bilateral relationship between Kazakhstan and China. Their leader Gojamberdi has even been arrested twice, in 2003 and 2005, while addressing the situation in Xinjiang. The last decade, approximately 30 Uyghurs have been extradited to China, and Ittipak continuously voice this theme, to the frustration of the Kazakh authorities. Additionally, Gojamberdi is regularly exposed to telephone threats with unknown addressees, and his position in Ittipak evidently has private costs. The leader’s “life assurance” against potential encroachment from the Kazakh authorities, evidently lies within his ability to raise international awareness of the diaspora’s activities. His position as the vice-president of the WUC and the support from this apparatus is also of paramount importance.

Comparing to Kyrgyzstan, Gojamberdi asserts that Uyghur top-activists situated in Kazakhstan are more exposed to governmental pressure, whereas Kazakh Uyghurs in their daily round have better conditions for maintaining their distinctiveness. This is facilitated by thirteen Uyghur schools (Uyghur the language of instruction) which only enrol Uyghur pupils, a Uyghur cultural centre, a weekly newspaper, and a weekly Uyghur news telecast (of 15-20 minutes). However, the last few years, the Kazakh authorities have restricted the operations of their media channels.

5.2.2. Kyrgyzstan: Latitude for domestic opposition, but not against the PRC.

The Kyrgyz Ittipak was inceptioned in 1989 to preserve Uyghur language and culture, to raise a Uyghur consciousness among the youngsters, and to help arriving Uyghur migrants from Xinjiang.⁹⁵ Their activities are covertly funded by Uyghur businessmen, while the Kyrgyz authorities provide the society with an office and free electricity at the People's House in Bishkek. According to their current leader Rozimuhammed Abdulkabiev, the Ittipak society adopted a clause in their charter in 1994, which urged for a separation of East-Turkistan from the PRC. Thus, he asserts that the Chinese authorities perceive him as the foremost separatist in Kyrgyzstan, which in turn exposes him to intense pressure from various (covert) directions.

The former leader of Ittipak, Nigmat Bazakov was killed by unknown assassins on 28 March 2000, and to be “in the frontline” has also occasioned subtle as well as directly manifested threats for the successor Abdulkabiev. In conversations with high-ranked officers from the police and the armed forces, he has been warned not to be too visible in discrediting the Chinese regime. Otherwise, he or his family would allegedly be sanctioned in various ways. In connection with the celebration of Ittipak's fifteenth year anniversary in 2004, more threats were passed on to Abdulkabiev. Ittipak with its 700 invited guests was also denied to rent the Kyrgyz Drama Theatre in Bishkek, allegedly after direct order from the State Secretary. This was caused by a statement from Abdulkabiev, where he revealed sentiments for an independent East Turkistan to a Kyrgyz newspaper. At that stage, the Kyrgyz State Secretary gave Abdulkabiev the following ultimatum; publish a refutation note and the celebration can be carried out. In the end, Ittipak's board rejected this “offer” and chose not to make any concessions.

Another important organisation in Bishkek is the human rights organisation Democracy, which was initiated in 1998 by Tursun Islam (also one of Ittipak's founders). Their activities are self-financed by 120 members and coordinated by a board of twelve members. The organisation's main activity is to provide Uyghurs with

⁹⁵ The head of the Kyrgyz Ittipak society, Rozimuhammed Abdulkabiev argued that the Uyghur language had been undermined during the reign of the Soviet Union. Therefore, many Uyghurs are not fluent in the Uyghur language and thus tend to communicate in Russian, Uzbek or Kyrgyz language. Naturally, this is something that Ittipak aspires to do something with. At a major Nawroz celebration (heralding the spring) in Oslo in 2007, I observed that a majority of the Uyghurs previously living in Almaty or Bishkek, tended to communicate in Russian. Uyghur refugees directly from Xinjiang may actually encounter problems while communicating with these exile Uyghurs. Hence, a plausible reflection may be that the Soviet authorities were more successful to weaken Uyghur boundaries of distinctiveness, compared to that of the PRC Government in Xinjiang. Thus, the Uyghur expatriate leaders have a formidable task to rejuvenate the Uyghur language, in order to pass on this heritage to the future generations.

help in legal matters, and they are also linked with the WUC, where Islam functions as their legal advisor. In May 2006, Democracy demonstrated in front of Uzbekistan's embassy due to their extradition of the Uyghur-Canadian Celil to the Chinese authorities. Two weeks later, they organized a similar demonstration in front of the Chinese embassy, and afterwards, the Kyrgyz national Security Service carried out a control of the participants' documents. Islam was detained for interrogations, but released after pressure from demonstrating Kyrgyz human rights groups. Moreover, Islam received two telephone calls with unknown addressees, which "reminded" him about the fate of the former leader of Ittipak.

A common deep sigh expressed by Islam and Abdulbakiev is how the media and in particular Channel Five and the newspaper Vecherniy Bishkek portray the Uyghurs. In crime-related events, these mediums only mention ethnicity when Uyghurs are involved. Moreover, some published articles tend to label Uyghurs as terrorists and extremists (Mukhamedov 2004, personal communication 2007). Unfortunately, the activities of these mostly secular and western-oriented Uyghurs are at times equated with radical Islamist movements, operating in the complex Ferghana Valley, where the borders of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan coincide.⁹⁶

5.3. Uyghur cyber separatism on the World Wide Web.

Since the late 1990s, the Uyghur diaspora and its activists have discovered the utility value of the World Wide Web as an instrument to mobilize and coordinate Uyghurs worldwide, as well as to generate international awareness of recent events in Xinjiang. The ripple effect of a plethora of increasingly vocal and well organized Uyghur movements abroad, is the establishment of various online websites. The accelerated accessibility to the internet has turned it into the major instrument for communication among Uyghur activists (Kanat 2005). Thus, by employing this mass communication technology, they have to some extent managed to overcome the boundaries of time and space, along with political censorship (Petersen 2006:65).

⁹⁶ The Islamic Movement for Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) have been the main movements operating in the Ferghana Valley. Their supporters have been persecuted and incarcerated in large numbers by the authorities in all the three countries. In particular, this was showcased for a wider world-audience in 2005, when the Uzbek security forces clamped down on the IMU-initiated Andijan uprising, killing several hundred demonstrators (Mihalka 2006:132-33).

Gladney timely depicts this as cyber-separatism, where virtual voices constitute a new outlet of opposition towards the Chinese regime (2004b:383). This is the new scenery for an ideological battle, where the PRC's propaganda machinery and the leadership of the diaspora clash. Both parts employ a wide range of "irrefutable" cyber-narratives to denounce one another's *modus operandi*, and to "lock-in", alternatively "unlock" Uyghurs and the territory from Chinese domination. Consequently, the Uyghur diaspora invest substantial energy in their endeavours to design sophisticated and up-to-date sites, as they aspire to attract international attention and to be considered as a credible source among their audience.

The competing World Uyghur Congress (WUC) and the East Turkestan National Freedom Center's (ETNFC) government-in-exile (still accessible online) are among the diasporic groups with the most advanced online homepages. The design and content of the WUC's webpage (uyghurcongress.org) have evidently been inspired by their affiliated subgroup, the Uyghur American Association (UAA) (uyghuramerican.org). The UAA has been a frontrunner in the virtual diasporic world and they also run a professional, lucid and updated webpage for their Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) (uhrp.org). These websites have links to each other and are written in English, Uyghur, Chinese and German versions, in order to be accessible for a wider audience. Additionally, the Munich-based and seemingly pro-WUC, Eastern Turkistan Information Center (uygur.org), distributes electronic newsletters and operates a semi-professional, semi-updated webpage. Regarding ETNFC's webpage for the exiled government (eastturkistangovernmentinexile.us), this site has been relatively inactive in 2007, although it still distributes newsletters about Xinjiang.

Another popular site among expatriate Uyghurs is Meshrep (meshrep.com), which was established in 2004, to introduce "Uighur culture, art, music, jokes and songs to those who are interested in Uighur tradition and culture" (2007). Meshrep contains articles about the history of East Turkistan, poetries with subtle resistance against the PRC, links to Xinjiang-articles penned by international scholars, and a calendar which presents important memorial days, national days, founding dates for various diasporic groups, and contributions from a variety of Uyghur personalities.

Nevertheless, Meshrep is considerably less focused on political activism and independence for East Turkistan, than the above-mentioned groups/ websites.

After a comprehensive survey of these diasporic websites, the following commonalities frequently appear; cyber-narratives showcasing a glorious Uyghur past, Uyghur poetry and folklore, maps crossing out the name of Xinjiang and replacing it with East Turkistan, Uyghur symbols as the blue flag of the ETR (1944-49) and other national icons (sites and holy mosques), pictures allegedly revealing Chinese brutality towards incarcerated Uyghurs, and a general denouncement of the PRC government. Moreover, these sites provide recent news updates from the region.

Regarding a potential connection between Uyghur diasporic groups and militant Islam at the virtual arena, Gladney found very little evidence suggesting such a link in 2004. Moreover, he found almost no requests for an Islamic Jihad against the PRC (2004b:388). Overall, the same depiction applies for 2007, with a few exceptions that I partly addressed in chapter 4.1.1. In 2006, two videos calling for Jihad in Eastern Turkistan were published online. These videos displayed Uyghur militants and showcased their archenemy, Xinjiang's *de facto* number one communist cadre, Wang Lequan. Both videos also contained a map where the name Xinjiang was crossed out. Additionally, I have come across an alleged homepage for the Islamic Party of Turkistan, which calls for Jihad against the PRC and displays photos of previous sabotage acts in Xinjiang. To be affiliated with such activities would be devastating for the diaspora, and thus, they operate with a distinct secular outlook to be distinguishable from violent religious activists, aspiring to incept an Islamic caliphate.

Another important aspect concerning the diasporic websites is the initiated debate forums and chat rooms, which enable exile groups and individuals to interact more effectively at the virtual scene. The Uyghur scholar Kilic Kanat emphasizes that these forums have mobilized a wider segment of the diaspora, as they now may enter heated discussions with invented nicknames. This anonymity ensures a wider spectrum of expressed aspirations and ideas on the Uyghur question (2005). Not all Uyghurs have been willing to voice their discontent and preferences publicly, as such activities may expose their remaining relatives in Xinjiang to the wrath of the PRC security forces. In phone calls with relatives in Xinjiang, my Norwegian acquaintance Semet

Abla has on several occasions been interrupted by the local security forces, and with regards to his diasporic activities, been urged not to “forget” about his remaining relatives in Xinjiang.

A plausible question to address at this stage is whether these Uyghur “cyber-activists” constitute a transverse section of the diaspora? Kanat argues that well-educated male nationalists and political activists, with a middle- to higher- income level are still numerically dominating the “virtual Uyghur world”. Their language of operation is typically English or alternatively Uyghur with Latin script. Hence, these activists do not constitute an accurate sample of neither Uyghurs situated in Xinjiang nor the diaspora at large. Their transnational Uyghur virtual world is characterized by an attempt to construct a “diasporic Uyghur identity”, which is mainly secular (de-emphasizing Islam), nationalistic (Uyghur, not pan-Turkic), and that orbits a western mindset of democracy and human rights (2005:2-4).

Kristian Petersen gives his consent to Kanat’s depictions and further notes that these cyber activists employ the internet to display for a wider audience, their perception of “Uyghurness”. From a survey of these sites, he contends that the diaspora depicts a state where “all Uighurs are aligned in their goals and desire of a free ‘East Turkistan’ ”. Petersen emphasizes that this is erroneous and that the diaspora in general “have been able to usurp the modern Uighur identity”, as not all Uyghurs aspire a breakaway from the PRC (2006:66-71). This is evidently a plausible point, although I do not possess any unbiased and reliable figures on Xinjiang-Uyghurs’ preferred end-state for the region. A certain share of the population does most likely “only” ask for a *de facto* regional autonomy under the auspices of the PRC.

Nevertheless, the Uyghurs I met with in Xinjiang expressed sentiments for independence, but stressed that such thoughts would only lead to sanctions from the authorities. One Uyghur also emphasized that some Uyghurs are sceptical about the initiation of East Turkistan, due to financial concerns. Independence from China may hamper the economical development with a prospect for relatively poorer conditions, such as in the other Central Asian states (Gladney 2004b:393). However, my prediction is still that a majority among the Uyghurs are supportive of a territorial breakaway from China. Notwithstanding, this is only a hypothetical question that

presumably amounts to nothing else than a far-off utopia for resigned Uyghurs, with more urgent concerns in their daily life.

Another aspect to consider is that the most prominent diasporic leaders have not visited Xinjiang for a long time, due to an understandable fear of being imprisoned by the Chinese authorities. Hence, they may have “lost touch” with prevailing sentiments among the Uyghur population. Nor have they experienced the improved living conditions in the region. However, with the increment of Kadeer to the diaspora in 2005, this situation has improved, even though she was incarcerated back in 1999. In addition, with her enrolment in the WUC, the diaspora in general got a voice that is well-known and seemingly respected among the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. This is a great asset for the WUC, but does not change the fact that the Uyghurs in the region have very limited knowledge about the diaspora, and the outside world’s involvement.

From the PRC government’s point of view, an advanced “Great Firewall of China” (internet filter) has to be credited for this “veil of ignorance”. A report from Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Harvard Law School, concluded in 2004, that China’s filtering regime is the most sophisticated effort of its kind in the world. According to Johan Lagerkvist and other international experts, the PRC government has access to the leading IT companies that provide them with the necessary supply solutions to monitor online activities.⁹⁷ With a Chinese online population that reached approximately 123 million by mid-2006, the authorities have had to figure out “what is fit to know” for this stratum (Dai 2007:189). Evidently, Uyghur diasporic virtual dissent has been considered an anathema and effectively blocked. Thus, it has naturally rendered it utterly difficult for the Uyghur “online population” in Xinjiang, to learn about the diaspora’s endeavours.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Lagerkvist depicts the following “grand paradox” in the Chinese public sphere: Currently, two diverging trends have been manifested simultaneously, as the old traditional media has endured a stricter authoritarian state control (“locking-in the public sphere”), whereas the new online medium experiences more social freedom (“unlocking the public sphere”) (Dai 2007). However, the Chinese authorities also clamp down on online dissent and the Human Right Watch estimated in 2005, that 60 persons were serving prison sentence for their Internet-based political crimes (Forney 2005:27).

⁹⁸ During my round trip in Xinjiang, I was unable to enter a wide range of diasporic websites. I visited internet cafés in Urumqi, Korla, Khotan and Kashgar. In Kashgar, they strictly enforced a document check and a registration before I could use their services. This was the standard procedure at all of the city’s internet cafés, and increases the authorities’ capacity of monitoring the users. In neighbouring Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) and Almaty (Kazakhstan), I was able to access all major Uyghur expatriate homepages during a stay in April 2007.

6.0. PRC state- and nation-building in Xinjiang: A concluding synopsis.

An expressed objective of this thesis has been to analyse the situation in Xinjiang through a conceptual state- and nation-building lens, and as such, potentially fill a void in the Xinjiang-literature. The focal point of my study was to illuminate the continuous tension between **order** (centres' "locking-in" of a territory, its resources and actors) and **movement** (boundary-breakdown and transcendence) which typically characterize a centre-periphery relation. Consequently, my research questions embodied this inherent tension as I aspired to scrutinize the following:

A) The PRC government's "technologies of deterrence" to foreclose Xinjiang's external territorial boundaries, and domestically, their "locking-in technologies" to *de jure* and *de facto* monopolize their mode of operation in the region. Moreover, whether any peripheral Uyghur counter-cultures or neighbouring states constitute a credible threat to the PRC state building project in Xinjiang.

B) The PRC's centre-initiated efforts to strengthen a notion among the Uyghurs that their "Manifest Destiny" is to orbit the Chinese nation, and as such, weaken their religious, linguistic, folkloristic and general affinity bonds to other civilizations in Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Furthermore, Uyghur counter-cultures' (nation-builders') aspire to solidify/accentuate their membership space and to undermine the Chinese authorities' nation-building campaigns.

Striking a balance in 2007, what can be inferred about the status of Beijing's overall state- and nation-building project in Xinjiang? In brief, I argue that the communist regime's physical hold on Xinjiang is historically strong in 2007. Their adequate deterrence capabilities toward potential state-aggression and "locking-in mechanisms" to domesticate Uyghur separatists, effectively hold "exit"/ transcendence at bay. Recollecting the region's historical function as a "cultural blotter" for different civilizations, polity formations and warlords, this has not been a matter of course.

However, brute force cannot itself conquer Uyghurs' "hearts and minds". The Uyghur *minzu* is arguably among the most culturally impenetrable groups, and the non-spatial distance between the traditional "Uyghur way of life" and the "Han modernity" is evidently vast. The regime's nation-building thrusts have for the most parts conveyed standardizations/ restrictions ("sticks") rather than confidence-

inspiring “carrots” (socio-religious latitude and economical prosperity). With the campaigns’ negative resonance, the government has attempted to create new heroes, myths and legends at the expense of corresponding Uyghur ideals, epics and tales. What many Uyghurs perceive as a “Trojan Horse” (influx of Han assimilating forces), may strengthen the regime’s physical hold on the region, but simultaneously alienate a larger segment of the Uyghurs. This in turn might engender an inverted effect (challenging the PRC machinery), where Uyghur activists eventually employ more desperate means to address their situation. Nonetheless, the Chinese government’s military-administrative control of the region is as strong as ever in 2007.

6.1. The PRC state building machinery: “Locking-in” Xinjiang and its Uyghurs.

With this section I summarize the most important “locking-in” junctures in Xinjiang:

1. The paramilitary Bingtuan has together with the PLA functioned as vectors of the centre, by **a)** deterring potential state aggression and **b)** safeguarding Xinjiang’s internal order. Although Xinjiang at times has been exposed to external as well as internal challenges, these coercive agencies have nevertheless managed to uphold the PRC’s territorial integrity in Xinjiang. Especially the “footprints” of the Bingtuan has been manifested throughout the region, as it has functioned as a powerful colonizing force for the large scores of regime-loyal Hans. However, their presence in the south is currently inadequate and this will be their future area of concentration.

2. With the XUAR’s autonomous status in 1955, it seemed like the numerically dominant Uyghurs attained a *de jure* proxy to become masters of their own house. In reality, the “Noah’s ark” principle of parcelling the territory into sub-autonomies, “locked” the Uyghurs within the “Chinese House”. Xinjiang’s other indigenous peoples obtained a disproportional share of the power and became more aligned with the PRC government (*status quo* oriented, rather than aspiring a territorial breakaway).

3. The disintegration of Soviet in 1991 radically altered the geopolitical environment in the region and thus the PRC’s external threat perceptions. With the inauguration of the Shanghai Five (1996) and its successor the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (2001), the neighbouring states did no longer constitute a likely threat to China’s territorial integrity. Quite the contrary, tension-reducing efforts resulted in a more extensive inter-state cooperation, and from the PRC government’s point of view,

the SCO-arrangement has been especially useful in terms of sanctioning “troubling” Uyghur diasporic organisations and prominent individuals. This clamp-down gained further momentum in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, and at present, the SCO-members more vigorously emphasize the need to confront the “three evils, terrorism, separatism and extremism”. Thus, the PRC has achieved a twofold gain; reduced external state aggression and an “emasculated” Uyghur diaspora in the SCO-region.

4. Simultaneously as China dramatically improved its external inter-state relations, Xinjiang itself was exposed to an intensified regime-dissenting Uyghur voice. Hence, the authorities embarked on the anti-separatism campaign “Strike hard, maximum pressure”, and eventually clamped down on these dissenting forces. Further, the campaign “Open up the West” facilitated the settlement of regime-loyal Hans deeper into the “Uyghur heartland” (“the peacock flies westwards”). Although these strategies have caused some social unrest and been perceived as a PRC version of the “Trojan Horse”, it has nevertheless strengthened their “physical lock” on Xinjiang.

5. The incidents on September 11, 2001 had ripple effects on various centre-periphery conflicts around the world, and in its aftermath, a window of opportunity unveiled for many regimes to bandwagon with the U.S. in their “War on terrorism”. Consequently, the PRC authorities found it opportune to equate Uyghur nationalists and separatists with international terrorists, and as such aspired to obtain an international *carte blanche* to clamp down on this “threat”. The attentive PRC “terrorist radar” has thus rendered it utterly difficult for counter-cultures to challenge the PRC’s state building machinery. This is also a widespread notion among the Uyghurs, and during my journey to Central Asia and Xinjiang, most people stressed that armed resistance is simply a futile spill of Uyghur blood.

6.2. Chinese nation-builders versus Uyghur counter-cultures operating covertly.

While the PRC government has managed to effectively address the spatial dimension of their campaigns in Xinjiang, they have encountered more ardent opposition (boundary accentuation) from Uyghur counter-cultures in their nation-building efforts. These policies have been initiated to weaken Uyghurs’ orientation toward their traditional cultural centres and to strengthen the notion of “a Manifest PRC Destiny” (Beijing as the cultural epicentre). Thus, Uyghurs as citizens of the Chinese nation are

first of all expected to show their allegiance to the regime's *modus operandi*. Their Uyghur group identity should be of secondary importance to that of the "beloved Chinese Motherland". In this regard, I surveyed on the one hand, the regime's efforts to institutionalize the "House of Islam", the region's educational system (promoting an "advanced Han modernity"), and their actions to ensure cultural conformity among ordinary Uyghurs and artists. On the other hand, I scrutinized the state of the Uyghur identity and Uyghur counter-cultures' overt and covert counter-thrusts to preserve their distinctive markers, and as such, its denouncement of "a Manifest PRC Destiny". In the sections below, I summarize this centre-periphery tension:

Uyghur identity: Evidently the potential reach and scope of the regime's nation-building endeavours depend on how strong the collective Uyghur identity is, and to what extent it dictates its members' conduct. In this regard, Rudelson argued that although the Uyghur identity has gained tremendous ground the last fifty years, it is nevertheless an artificial top-down administrative construct. Hence, local oasis identities take precedence over an overall Uyghur identity, which is fairly easy to manipulate. The core of his argument is that "diversity is the eldest daughter of distance", and thus, the Uyghur nation-builders' project is rendered utterly difficult. Brophy on the other hand argues that this assertion has an inclination of "reading the past into the present" as he observes a strong and coherent Uyghur identity.

My personal reflection is that even though the Uyghur identity initially was an elitist construct à la Anderson's "imagined community" (this is naturally debateable), it has at later stages also been cultivated from below (by the Uyghur masses). Conducted surveys in Xinjiang support this notion and although it is a vast territory, the regime's infrastructural developments have rendered it much easier for Uyghurs to communicate with each other. This was illustrated during my journey to Xinjiang, where I encountered **a)** a female Uyghur on an inter-oasis bus, who was on her way southwards to Khotan from the far north; and **b)** a male Uyghur university student also from the north, who ended up in Kashgar due to his previous mediocre grades. Hence, the PRC authorities' efforts to "open up" the region, might also enable the Uyghur nation-builders to more effectively address the challenge of Xinjiang's huge distances.

Xinjiang's "House of Islam": Islam is a major pillar of the Uyghur identity and perceived as their "protecting jacket", which provides the proper codes of conduct. However, the PRC authorities have undermined Islam's position by confiscating the mosques' properties, eliminating Islamic taxes, abolishing Islamic courts/ judge systems, educating Xinjiang's religious figures and by deciding what religious literature Uyghurs may legally possess. Recently, the authorities' "locking-in" of the "House of Islam" has become even more comprehensive, and Uyghurs under the age of eighteen are prohibited from mosque attendance and religious instructions. Uyghur counter-cultures have secretly attempted to omit these restrictions with the Meshrep-gatherings and private education. In this manner, they hope to ensure that future generations obtain appropriate codes of Uyghur conduct, through the ideals of Islam.

Official policies toward the sphere of education and cultural production: Rokkan once pronounced that "language is fate", and as such a paramount identity-building "technology". Hence, a critical aspect of the regime's educational strategy in Xinjiang has been the language of instruction. Eventually, Mandarin has become the *lingua franca* at the expense of Uyghur, and a mastery of it seems to be a *sine qua non* for secular advancement. This poses a great dilemma to the Uyghur parents: Should their child enrol at a Uyghur or Chinese language school? A compromise solution has been to send their daughters to Uyghur language schools (boundary-accentuation), while the sons have enrolled at Chinese language schools (boundary- de-accentuation).

The educational system has also been employed to present a streamlined version of Xinjiang's history, the tenets of socialism, and in general, to downplay Uyghurs' history and traditional culture. The same depiction applies for the sphere of cultural production, where Uyghur narrative arts containing regime-dissent, separatist sentiments, or general grievance with the PRC government, have been sanctioned. Hence, the authorities have aspired to "lock-in" Uyghurs in the ideological sphere and pressure them to present "appropriate tales". Uyghur countercultures can only "re-educate" (boundary accentuation) their children discretely in the private realms of life, but need to stay alert, in order to avoid the attentive and repressive "PRC radar".

Uyghurs socio-economic prospects: The nation-building aspect of the campaign "Open up the West" has been to increase Uyghurs' prosperity ("carrot") and

as such, to arouse pro-regime sentiments. However, this has by and large been counterproductive as **a)** the Central Government has been the main beneficiary of the extraction of Xinjiang's invaluable resources, and **b)** "the peacock who has flown west" (Han Chinese), has occupied the most lucrative positions in the state and private sector. Uyghurs on the other hand strive with the "glass ceiling" of the labour market (social stigmata), and its widespread *guanxi* practice ("backdoor system"). This in turn is a major hindrance for the regime's nation-building endeavours. Rather than winning Uyghur "hearts and minds", the PRC authorities have further alienated the Uyghurs.

Uyghurs' responses to the PRC state- and nation-building: Among the Uyghurs, one may observe three broader responses to the PRC's campaigns in Xinjiang: **1. Acculturation:** A few Uyghurs adjust to the "Han-style modernity", in order to thrive in the Chinese society (boundary-de-accentuation). **2. Autonomists:** Their strategy is to obtain a *de facto* autonomy as an instrument to conserve the "Uyghur way of life", and as such, cultivate a non-spatial and spatial distance to the Han Chinese (reverse settlement). Furthermore, to accentuate a non-spatial distance to Xinjiang's other indigenous peoples. **3. Separatists:** They also aspire to safeguard distinctive Uyghur markers, but perceive it as necessary to break away from Chinese domination. In this regard, one may distinguish between secular and Islamic activists, and whether they employ a violent or non-violent strategy.

While few Uyghurs are outright acculturated, it is more difficult to assess whether the path of autonomy or separatism has the strongest support. Arguably, an unbiased survey among "unrestrained" Uyghurs would reveal separatist sentiments. However, as they have made peace with the new realities, they also refrain from participating in such activities, and rather await better times. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to conclude that the negative resonance of the PRC state- and nation-building endeavours has strengthened the notion of social group stigmata, and as such, fostered Uyghur intergroup behaviour (strengthening of in-group identity, in-group behavioural conformity) and increased the potential for inter-group conflict. But for the time being, one cannot escape the impression that Uyghurs in general are resigned as their irresolution is pronounced. Consequently, several activists have chosen to emigrate abroad, in order to vigorously (and more freely) raise the Uyghur voice.

The Uyghur diaspora: Voices for East Turkistan: The exiled Uyghurs have aspired to rally international sympathy for their situation and undermine the communist regime's international legitimacy. In the late 1990s and onwards, several diasporic groups have emerged to represent the "silenced voice" of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, and to coordinate Uyghurs' efforts worldwide. An important forum in this regard has been the World Wide Web (cyber-separatism), which has enabled the diaspora to overcome the boundaries of time and space. However, these virtual activities are mainly directed at Uyghur expatriates and an international audience, as the "Great firewall of China" block their access to Xinjiang's online population.

Until recently, the diaspora has been restrained by fragmentation and internal disputes as far as policy framing are concerned. However, with the WUC's acquisition of Kadeer (their "matriarch"), the exile-community is more unified than ever before, and currently operates with a fair wind as she obtains private audience with important world leaders. This is evidently a challenge for the PRC leadership, and presumably, her appearance raises greater concern than Uyghur militancy in Xinjiang itself.

6.3. Possible development in Xinjiang the coming years: Some final thoughts.

Concerning potential courses of development in Xinjiang, one cannot avoid considering the interplay between endogenous factors (political decisions, activities, trends, and incidents within contemporary China) and exogenous factors (international relations, popular movements, trends and incidents outside the PRC), that might have an impact on the situation in Xinjiang. While the centre-initiated campaigns "Strike hard, maximum pressure" and "Open up the West" embody the former, the September 11, 2001 incident with its ripple effects extending to Xinjiang, exemplifies the latter.

It seems safe to predict that the Chinese authorities will continue to vigorously pursue their strategic interests in Xinjiang, and make no concessions to forces that might undermine their state- and nation-building endeavours. The region is simply too important from a geopolitical and geo-economical perspective, and according to the PRC threat perception, also vulnerable to non-traditional security threats (the "three ills of terrorism, separatism and extremism"). Consequently, "the peacock will continue to fly westwards", and by so doing, further "open up" the region, to more effectively encircle the Uyghurs southwards. This is bound to increase the pressure on

Xinjiang's fragile ecology and to expose the tight labour market to additional pressure (increase the rate of Uyghur unemployment and underemployment). Hence, a principal question for prospective research on Xinjiang is whether the increased "footprints" of the Hans will eventually cause more inter-ethnic conflict and increase the rate of violent acts by desperate Uyghur activists. Even though most Uyghurs currently appear to be quite resigned, one cannot preclude that new generations might be radicalized in their efforts to disrupt the PRC machinery.

The Chinese scholar Li finds wisdom in this old Chinese idiom; "the tree craves calm, but the wind will not subside", as he predicts that "the fight between separatism and unity" will intensify and challenge the PRC in the years to come (2005:293). This forecast seems especially realistic for the issuant Uyghur diaspora, and it may possibly culminate with a designation of Kadeer as the Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 2007 or 2008. Moreover, the upcoming Olympic Games in 2008 unveils a window of opportunity to illuminate the Xinjiang question. Although the Chinese authorities vigorously defame Kadeer and the Uyghur diaspora, they are neither immune to international criticism, and particularly not in the prelude to the Olympic Games.

However, there are tendencies suggesting that while China is solidifying its position of power internationally (both in absolute and relative terms), the PRC authorities have also become more inclined to brush aside international criticism. This tendency is likely to be more pronounced in the aftermath of the Olympic Games, when Beijing's operations are not as intensively in the limelight of the international media. Moreover, with the SCO-arrangement's major boost the last few years (lately manifested in August 2007, with the extensive anti-terrorist exercise "Peace Mission") and the Sino-Russian rapprochement, Chinese authorities by no means orbit the "Western (U.S.) solar system". Quite the contrary, Russia and China operate in tandem to contain the influence U.S. in Central Asia (the new "Great Game"), and the Sino-U.S. relation may become tenser in the next years. Hence, when the U.S. authorities' seek to address their concerns for the PRC's mode of operation in Xinjiang, they have quite poor prospects to find understanding from the Chinese authorities. To conclude, great-power politics evidently have an impact on the region and its peoples, and thus it need to be thoroughly considered in prospective analysis of Xinjiang.

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